

Baptism and Infant Baptism from the New Testament through Barth

Baptism is one of the oldest Christian practices. Consequently, the church's theologians have long reflected upon it. As with all other doctrines, one must understand baptism's history if one is to reflect critically upon its present meaning and significance. Furthermore, familiarity with the doctrine's history enables one to better recognize what is at stake in Barth's criticism of infant baptism, coming as it does at a particular point in the doctrine's development. In what follows, I will provide a relatively brief sketch of baptism's history with an eye especially toward infant baptism's role in that history. Aside from providing a general orientation, this material will identify the two primary arguments offered by Christian theology in support of infant baptism; the first associated with the theological synthesis developed by Augustine, and the second established primarily by the Reformed tradition in response to a modification in that synthesis.¹ I call these the "sacramental" and "covenantal" arguments for infant baptism. Following this historical sketch, I will identify the crisis of infant baptism that emerged from the Protestant Reformation. This crisis grows from Calvin's doctrine of baptism, bearing fruit in Friedrich Schleiermacher's assessment of this practice and, definitively for this study, in Karl Barth's rejection of it. Finally, I will turn to the reception of Barth's work on baptism and the matter of locating my own work within that larger reception-history.

1. This is not to suggest that there are only two possible arguments to be made in support of infant baptism. Indeed, myriad such arguments of drastically varying quality have been offered, and I will advance my own "third way" toward the end of this volume. However, the two arguments that I highlight here are preeminent as far as the historical development of the doctrine of baptism is concerned. Indeed, and simply as a historical observation, the other arguments that might be advanced in support of infant baptism seems to require correlation with one of these two in order to gain significant traction.

BAPTISM: A HISTORICAL SKETCH

This section will very briefly trace the history of baptism from the New Testament through the Reformation as represented and solidified by John Calvin. It includes three subsections that deal consecutively with baptism in the New Testament and the development of baptismal theology and liturgy to the mid-fourth century, infant baptism's origins culminating in Augustine, and the way in which the Reformation modified Augustine's synthesis.

THE SHAPE OF BAPTISM IN THE EARLY CENTURIES

The New Testament contains a wide range of references to baptism. Since a comprehensive treatment would require a separate monograph, and others have ably performed the task, I will not attempt such a survey here.² There are two aspects of the New Testament's discussion of baptism that I wish to highlight, however. The first of these aspects is the ethical function of baptism, and the second is baptism's relationship to mission. Both of these aspects will be important in later chapters with reference to Barth's doctrine of baptism and to my own constructive points. It will be beneficial to briefly note their biblical grounding here.

David F. Wright makes much of baptism's "constitutive and practical significance . . . for the apostolic churches." He refers here to how the New Testament, and especially the Pauline epistles, makes baptism "the ground of exhortation, admonition and instruction."³ In other words, the New Testament makes demands upon its readers on the basis of their baptism. The paradigmatic instance of this function is found in Romans 6:1-11, as Wright correctly notes. While this passage is often taken as the most direct teaching in the New Testament concerning the doctrine of baptism, "it is not Paul's aim . . . to provide an instruction on baptism."⁴ Rather, Paul alludes to baptism as a common basis of agreement with his readers in Rome and argues on that basis for their adoption of a certain way of being. In particular, he wants them

2. See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 99-198; Lars Hartman, "Into the Name of the Lord Jesus?": *Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 9-170; Markus Barth, *Die Taufe—Ein Sakrament?: Ein Exegetischer Beitrag zum Gespräch über die kirchliche Taufe* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1951); Erich Dinkler, "Die Taufaussagen des Neuen Testaments: Neu Untersucht im Hinblick auf Karl Barths Tauflehre," in *Zu Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe*, ed. F. Viering (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971).

3. David F. Wright, "One Baptism or Two? Reflections on the History of Christian Baptism," in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective: Collected Studies*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 269.

to “walk in newness of life” (v. 4). Mention of baptism serves this parenetic aim—which is, as Barth says, “the real thesis of the passage” (*CD IV/4*, 117; *KD IV/4*, 128). This aim is what I referred to above as baptism’s ethical function. Baptism is not a merely internal experience or independent moment in one’s life, regardless of what one understands that experience or moment to involve. Rather, it is deployed in the New Testament as the basis for a certain standard of behavior or mode of living. Because one has been baptized, one is expected to exhibit a certain quality of life. One might well ask, “What does baptism *do*, or how does it *function*, in the New Testament?” Chief among responsible answers to this question must be that baptism *demand*s something. Indeed, it was this line of thinking that led the Christian community in the following centuries to develop an elaborate catechetical system designed to ensure that those who undertook baptism were prepared to meet these demands.

The second aspect of the New Testament’s discussion of baptism that I want to highlight here is its relationship to the church’s missionary task. This is perhaps best seen with reference to the biblical book of Acts considered in terms of its overarching narrative structure. Luke Timothy Johnson observes that “Acts can appropriately be called the ‘Book of the Holy Spirit,’” and Arthur T. Pierson suggests that it might well be called *The Acts of the Holy Spirit* rather than of the apostles.⁵ The big-picture story told by Acts concerns the early Christian community’s expansion as it follows the Holy Spirit out of Jerusalem and into the nations. This expansion is punctuated at decisive points in the narrative by the Spirit’s activity. To provide a brief and selective overview, the story begins in chapter 2 with Pentecost and Peter’s preaching to the Jews gathered from the diaspora. It then carries in Jerusalem until an angel directs Philip in chapter 8 to meet an Ethiopian eunuch on the road to Gaza, to whom he preaches successfully. Next, Saul is called on the Damascus road in chapter 9. The Spirit punctuates this account when Ananias lays hands on him to restore his sight, as well as in the pericope’s conclusion in verse 31. Chapter 10 tells the story of how the gospel is first extended to the Gentiles through the ministry of Peter and the household of the centurion Cornelius. These two men meet after Peter receives a vision. Then the Spirit falls upon those Gentiles listening

4. Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 189. I will provide an exegetical discussion of this passage in the excursus attached to chapter three.

5. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 14; Arthur T. Pierson, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit: Being an Examination of the Active Mission and Ministry of the Spirit of God, the Divine Paraclete, as Set Forth in the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1896).

to Peter (v. 44), which the Jewish Christians with Peter think is an amazing occurrence (v. 45). As Sinclair Ferguson notes, “the coming of the Spirit to the household of Cornelius marks the breakthrough of the gospel into the Gentile world.”⁶ At the Jerusalem council in chapter 15, the lynchpin of Peter’s testimony on behalf of the Gentile mission—which carries the day—is that since God has given the Spirit to the Gentile believers as well as to the Jewish, the former need not become the latter (vv. 8–11). Finally, the Spirit is instrumental in Paul’s first journey into Europe in chapter 16 where Lydia becomes his first convert. To quote Johnson again, the expansive and expanding mission of the gospel in Acts “is willed, initiated, impelled, and guided by God through the Holy Spirit.”⁷

What does all this have to do with baptism? Readers familiar with the book of Acts will have already noticed. Baptism is associated with each of the decisive narrative points noted above: three thousand are baptized after Peter’s sermon in chapter 2; the Ethiopian eunuch is baptized in chapter 8; Saul is baptized in chapter 9; Cornelius and those with him upon whom the Spirit fell while Peter was preaching are baptized; baptism does not factor in chapter 15, but it plays a central role in chapter 11 when Peter first clashes with the Jewish believers over the conversion of Cornelius (v. 16); finally, Lydia and her household are baptized in chapter 16. Precisely how we should think of baptism’s role in connection with the gospel mission will be a topic of discussion in due course. For now, it is important to note that baptism accompanies and serves that mission.

It deserves mention that the New Testament does not provide, as Bryan Spinks notes, an “ideal pattern or ritual” or “some archetypal liturgical rite” for baptism as practiced by the earliest Christian communities.⁸ Jesus’ baptism by John in the Jordan might be taken as such, but the accounts of this event are very thin and the various descriptions of baptism in Acts provide sufficient variety to undermine the notion that Jesus’ baptism was treated as a ritual pattern. For an introduction to the shape of baptism insofar as it was a rite practiced by the earliest Christian communities, we must look first to that early church order document often associated with Hippolytus, namely, *Apostolic Tradition*. This document played an important part in the liturgical renewal movement of the mid-twentieth century, at which time consensus held that its

6. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, ed. Gerald Bray, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 81.

7. Johnson, *Acts*, 15.

8. Bryan D. Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the New Testament to the Council of Trent*, *Liturgy, Worship and Society* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 11–12.

provenance was Rome circa 215 CE. More recent scholarship has determined that it is a working document containing strata from various geographical and chronological locations ranging, in the latter case, from the middle of the second century until as late as the middle of the fourth century.⁹ Nonetheless, and precisely because it was such a living document, *Apostolic Tradition* provides a valuable look at early liturgical practices surrounding baptism.

To begin, one newly attracted to the church would first enroll in the catechumenate to undergo a period of preparation and instruction that usually lasted for three years.¹⁰ When a candidate was judged ready for baptism, which was generally performed on Easter morning, they entered upon a period of examination punctuated by exorcism. This preparation culminated in a vigil throughout the night before Easter, during which the candidates were sealed with oil on their forehead, ears, and noses, and once again exorcised. They also heard scripture readings and received instruction.¹¹ At cockcrow, the baptismal water—preferably flowing but at least poured into the baptistery—was prepared through prayer. The baptizands stripped and were baptized in groups: first children, then men, and finally women. Now, the baptism proper: oil of thanksgiving was prepared; the baptizands renounced Satan and were exorcised, and then entered the water with the deacon to stand with the bishop or presbyter. Once in the water, the baptizands underwent triple-immersion interspersed with an interrogation comprised of the three articles of the baptismal creed. The presbyter anointed the newly baptized as they came out of the water. They then dressed and entered the church. There the bishop laid hands on them and provided an invocation while anointing them once more. The newly baptized then participated for the first time in the prayers of the people, the kiss of peace, and the eucharistic service.¹²

While the *Apostolic Tradition* supplies a fairly early and rather complete picture of what baptism looked like in the church of the early centuries, it contains no reflection on baptismal theology. Any theological meaning must be inferred from the actions described or from the brief text of the bishop's invocation.¹³ One must look elsewhere to get a feel for the baptismal theology of this period. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem from about 350 CE until his death

9. See the following discussions: Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 327–33; Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, 28–31; Hippolytus, *On the Apostolic Tradition: An English Version with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Alistair Stewart-Sykes (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 22–32.

10. Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, 29.

11. Hippolytus, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, §20; 105–6.

12. *Ibid.*, §21; 110–14.

in 386, provides such theological commentary on the baptismal liturgy in his mystagogic catechetical lectures.¹⁴ Spinks helpfully sketches the main points of Cyril's baptismal ritual. These are the renunciation and creedal commitment; stripping, anointing, and baptism itself; the second anointing or "chrism"; and, finally, the white garment.¹⁵ Cyril's rite then moves out of the baptistery and into the church proper for the eucharistic celebration.

At its heart, the renunciation and confession of creedal commitment means a rejection of life as ruled by Satan and the embrace of life lived in the service of God. The baptizand faced west—symbolic of desert and darkness where Satan holds sway—stretched forth her hand and, "as in the presence of Satan," renounced him.¹⁶ Then the baptizand turned to face east—symbolic of light since the sun rises in the east—and confessed, "I believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost, and in one Baptism of repentance" (1.9). The preparatory rites were not yet finished, however, and the baptizands next stripped—symbolic of putting away one's past and also imitative of Christ, who was stripped on the cross—and were anointed (2.2–3). This initial anointing was performed "with exorcised oil," and by it those anointed were "made partakers of the good olive-tree, Jesus Christ" (2.3). Following this anointing, the baptizands were taken to the baptismal pool and immersed three times. For Cyril, this triple immersion symbolizes participation in Christ's death—he spent three days in the tomb—and resurrection. The water of baptism is thus the place of death and life, or "at once [our] grave and [our] mother," as Cyril puts it (2.4). Next, the second anointing or chrism completed transformation into the image of Christ. The baptizand had already died and been raised with Christ, and what remained was for her to receive the same Spirit by which Christ was anointed.

13. Spinks discusses certain interpretive difficulties surrounding this invocation and its location in the baptismal liturgy: see Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, 30.

14. For a helpful introduction to Cyril, see Edward Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem*, ed. Carol Harrison, *The Early Church Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 2000). Cyril's authorship of these lectures has been disputed, with arguments advanced in favor of assigning them to his successor, John. However, I am—like Ferguson—convinced by Doval's analysis in favor of Cyrilline authorship: see Alexis James Doval, *Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogue: The Authorship of the Mystagogic Catecheses*, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard, *North American Patristic Society Patristic Monograph Series* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001); Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 474. For arguments to the contrary, see Enrico Mazza, *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo, 1989), 150.

15. See Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, 38–42.

16. Cyril of Jerusalem, "The Mystagogic Catecheses," in *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 1.2. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

This practice follows the pattern of Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan, where the Spirit descends upon him as he comes up out of the water (3.4). Finally, we come to the white garments: "thou must be continually robed in white: of course we mean not this, that thou art always to wear white raiment; but thou must be clad in the garments that are truly white and shining and spiritual" (4.8).

What one finds in Cyril's mystagogy, and the brief discussion above provides a taste of this, is a wealth of word and image associations between what occurs in the baptismal liturgy and various biblical passages. Making associations between baptism and Christ's life is especially important for Cyril perhaps because he ministered in Jerusalem where so many of the gospel narratives take place. For Cyril, baptism is the "holy Laver of regeneration" (1.10) that cleanses from sin. Important here is the Holy Spirit, who is both a gift received through Christian baptism in distinction from John's baptism (2.6) and an important factor in baptism's sacramental efficacy.¹⁷ Cyril does not entertain questions of efficacy at significant length, however.

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF INFANT BAPTISM

With this general picture of baptism in the New Testament and the early Christian centuries in hand, the issue of infant baptism demands attention. Research into this question requires terminological clarity. As Wright points out, the standard distinction between infant baptism and believer's baptism can too easily be taken as one between baptism of children and of adults.¹⁸ Such thinking neglects the point that there is a wide range of ages at which children are able to make a profession of faith, however inchoate. A proper consideration of "believer's baptism" would have to include such children. So, to be precise, the language of "infant" or "paedo" baptism should not be understood as referring to children in general, but only to those children whose

17. Enrico Mazza implies that Cyril depends on Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy to explain the efficacy of sacramental rites. See Mazza, *Mystagogy*, 169. But Cyril clearly identifies the Spirit as the agent of baptism's effects, telling his hearers that "the Holy Ghost is about to seal your souls," and admonishing them to consider "not the Laver as simple water, but rather regard the spiritual grace that is given with the water" by virtue of its "having received the invocation of the Holy Ghost." Cyril, "Catechetical Lectures," 3.3. Mazza is not ignorant of the Spirit's presence in Cyril's treatment. For instance, see Mazza, *Mystagogy*, 160. But he does not take into account the Spirit's function when it comes to understanding the source of the rite's efficacy.

18. Wright, "The Origins of Infant Baptism—Child Believers' Baptism?," in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, 4. As Wright acknowledges, Kurt Aland was the first to note such difficulties, which he addressed by distinguishing between *Kindertaufe* and *Suglingstaufe*. Unfortunately, this terminological precision was lost in the English translation: see Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

age precludes their responsible baptism, that is, their ability to respond for themselves to the baptismal interrogations and thus bear witness to personal faith.

While some claim to find traces of infant baptism in the New Testament, the scholarly consensus is that no clear, indisputable evidence of the practice is present. On the other hand, there is likewise no clear, indisputable evidence that infant baptism did not occur in the earliest Christian communities. The first solid attestation of infant baptism comes from Tertullian around the turn of the third century CE. He responds to an argument for infant baptism, suggesting that it was not yet a fully established practice in North Africa. His argument pivots on the notion that responsible baptism is preferable because it lessens the possibility that the promises made by—or, in this case, for—the baptizand in baptism will later be rejected or, at least, remain unfulfilled. Thus Tertullian counsels: “let them be made Christians when they have become competent to know Christ.”¹⁹ However, it is important to be clear as to what exactly Tertullian opposes. His criticism of infant baptism has limits. What exercises him seems to be the argument that infants ought to be baptized in general and as a matter of course. Tertullian seems not to oppose all infant baptism; rather, he opposes the notion that baptizing infants ought to be standard baptismal practice. What baptism of infants is Tertullian willing to accept? He writes: “For what need is there [to baptize an infant], if there really is no need, for even their sponsors to be brought into peril, seeing they may possibly themselves fail of their promises by death, or be deceived by the subsequent development of an evil disposition?”²⁰ Here are the fears mentioned above, but note the language of “need.” Tertullian argues that if there is no need, baptism should wait until the child reaches a responsible age. At the same time, Tertullian does not oppose baptizing a child who has not yet reached that age where death threatens and produces a need. As Everett Ferguson notes, “Tertullian . . . does not argue against baptism in these cases but in ordinary circumstances.”²¹

19. Tertullian, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, trans. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1964), §18; 39.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 364. Lane takes Tertullian's protest against standardizing infant baptism to suggest that such practice was widespread. His reading rests on the assumption that Tertullian would have argued against the novelty of nonemergency infant baptism had he been able. Since Tertullian does not, so the reasoning goes, nonemergency baptism of infants must have been an established practice: see Anthony N. S. Lane, “Did the Apostolic Church Baptise Babies? A Seismological Approach,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 55, no. 1 (2004): 114. Ferguson answers Lane's primary argument, which is merely an argument from silence: see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 363–64n4.

Available evidence suggests that a position like Tertullian's prevailed through the fourth century. For instance, extant baptismal liturgies—such as the *Apostolic Tradition* and Cyril's materials, discussed above—presuppose baptizands of a responsible age, although at some point provision was made in the *Apostolic Tradition* for the baptism of those who could not yet answer for themselves.²² Further, scholars have long noted that during the fourth century it was widespread practice to delay or defer baptism until one's deathbed. The large number of extant homilies from this period that seek to persuade listeners to undertake baptism strengthen this impression. The logic involved here is that if one's sins are forgiven in baptism (as indicated above by Cyril), and if there are certain moral expectations that the church lays upon those who are baptized (as indicated above by the catechetical process, as well as by Tertullian's worries about standardizing infant baptism), then one receives the greatest benefit and least obligation from baptism administered at death's door.

Part of the issue here is that baptism had become associated with the ascetic life, as revealed by Basil the Great's harangue against those who would put off baptism: "Continence in old age is not continence but impotence."²³ The contrast with impotence suggests that the continence Basil has in mind is not the right ordering of human sexuality but the absence of sexual activity. His operative assumption is that such continence is required of the baptized. Gregory the Theologian moderates these expectations, associating with baptism not continence as the absence of sexual activity but its right ordering within marriage, but he does not break from the larger framework that understands baptism as saddling one with certain obligations.²⁴ These obligations led a great number of those associated with the church to lounge, as it were, in the catechumenate.

22. See Hippolytus, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, §21; 110–11. No such provision is found in the *Didache*, however, which everywhere presupposes responsible baptizands: see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 203–4; Nathan Mitchell, "Baptism in the *Didache*," in *The Didache in Context: Essays on Its Text, History and Transmission*, ed. Clayton N. Jefford, *Supplements to Novum Testamentum* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1995), 250–51. Mitchell's primary concern is to locate the *Didache*'s baptismal material within an interpretation that credits this document to a Jewish-Christian sect that "preaches what Jesus preached, but which does not necessarily preach Jesus," and which expected Gentile Christians "to embrace Torah observance" (255). It is important to remember the multifaceted character of those who followed Jesus in the first centuries when thinking through the early material dealing with baptism.

23. Basil of Caesarea, "Protreptic on Holy Baptism," in *Baptism: Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts*, ed. Andre Hamman (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1967), 83.

24. Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 40: On Holy Baptism," in *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), §18.

However, this terminology of delay or deferment is misleading because, as Wright points out, it gives “the impression that the two poles of practice were invariably paedobaptism on the one hand and deferred baptism on the other.”²⁵ In other words, this language assumes that those born within Christian society ought to have been baptized as infants, and that baptism at any other point in one’s life constitutes a deviation from the rule. Such an assumption is hard to substantiate. Indeed, Ferguson has argued—especially on the basis of burial inscriptions—that in this period baptism “was administered before death, at whatever age.”²⁶ He finds precious little evidence of a standard practice of infant baptism from which to deviate by practicing such baptism *in extremis*. Or, to call upon Ferguson once again, “if children were healthy, there is no evidence that their parents presented them for baptism.”²⁷ Indeed, and contrary to the assumption of standardized infant baptism, Wright argues that it was a common practice for Christian parents to enroll their newly born children in the catechumenate. He supplies, for instance, a long list of notable churchmen from the period—including Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, and Augustine—who were thus enrolled as infants and baptized as adults.²⁸

Taken together, one must conclude that the church both did and did not baptize infants in the early Christian centuries. It did baptize infants in situations where death threatened; it did not as a standard practice baptize infants who were not threatened by impending death. This state of affairs meshes well with Tertullian’s comments above, as well as those of Gregory the Theologian who argued that parents should wait until their children achieved three years of age before bringing them forward for baptism, since “at that time they begin to be responsible for their lives” and they can “listen and . . . answer something about the Sacrament.”²⁹ In other words, baptism was to be conducted when the candidate had reached a responsible age, barring unfortunate and dangerous circumstances.

Such practice reveals something important about infant baptism in these early centuries as well, namely, that it was not generally conducted out of a need to purge the newborn of guilt incurred from original sin. One could assume

25. Wright, “At What Ages Were People Baptized in the Early Centuries?,” in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, 63.

26. Everett Ferguson, “Inscriptions and the Origin of Infant Baptism,” in *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays*, 11, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 398.

27. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 627.

28. Wright, “Infant Dedication in the Early Church,” in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, 124.

29. Gregory of Nazianzus, “Oration 40,” 28.

that this is the motivation behind *in extremis* baptism of infants, but Wright is correct that this practice does not “necessarily entail regarding baptism as essential in order to avoid hell after death.”³⁰ Instead, it might be administered out of a desire to recognize that this infant who was about to die was born to a Christian family and should be counted as such, or it might have been administered with some effect in mind other than ensuring the infant a place in heaven. Despite a close association between baptism and the forgiveness of sin, the practice of baptizing infants did not carry this connotation through the fourth century because infants were understood to be innocent, having not yet committed any sins. Tertullian asked pointedly, “Why should innocent infancy come with haste to the remission of sins?”³¹ Gregory of Nyssa explains more expansively that “the innocent babe . . . does not need the soundness which comes from purgation, because it never admitted the plague into its soul at all.”³² Finally, Gregory the Theologian writes in one of his poems that baptism for infants is only a seal, while for adults it is both a remedy and a seal.³³

Only with Augustine did this link between infant baptism and the damning guilt of original sin become significant.³⁴ Even here, however, one must note that Augustine’s argument with the Pelagians moves from the practice of infant baptism—which he represents as a standard practice stretching back to the apostles—to the doctrine of original sin, and not the reverse. Both parties accept the possibility of infant baptism, but they disagree as to why it

30. Wright, “The Origins of Infant Baptism—Child Believers’ Baptism?,” in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, 13.

31. Tertullian, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, §18; 39.

32. Gregory of Nyssa, “On Infants’ Early Deaths,” in *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, Etc., Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 377.

33. See Gregory of Nazianzus, “Carmina,” in *Patrologia Cursus Completus . . . Series Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: 1957–83), v. 37, lines 91–92; as cited in David F. Wright, “The Meaning and Reference of ‘One Baptism for the Remission of Sins’ in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed,” in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, 57n9.

34. Augustine builds here on the church’s longstanding affirmation that baptism in some way achieves the forgiveness of the baptizand’s sins. Both Origen and Cyprian thought about what this affirmation means with reference to infant baptism. Origen looked to the Old Testament, arguing that infants require cleansing from the ceremonial defilement associated with childbirth. Cyprian did not explicitly move in this direction, although such movement might be present. Instead, he emphasized the infant’s involvement in the fallen, death-bound condition that afflicts all humanity. Concerning Origen, see Jean Laporte, “Models from Philo in Origen’s Teaching on Original Sin,” in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 116; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 368–69; Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, Revised and expanded ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 74–75. Concerning Cyprian, see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 370–71; Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 92.

is done. The Pelagian position, as presented by Augustine, is very similar to the reigning fourth-century position encountered above. Infants do not require baptism for the forgiveness of sins but are baptized for some other reason, in this case, “into the kingdom of heaven.”³⁵ Augustine argues that this is a false distinction and that baptism’s primary function is to provide forgiveness of sin. Correlatively, he argues that baptism is the only means of acquiring salvation. This further undermines the Pelagian position, which maintained that an infant’s innocence would ensure entrance into heavenly bliss should death steal the child away. For Augustine, “apart from Christ’s baptism, no eternal salvation is promised to infants.”³⁶ Augustine is relatively unconcerned with the counterargument that baptism’s efficacy depends on faith, which infants are unable to exercise. The baptismal theology he developed previously against the Donatists serves him well here. That is, baptism’s saving efficacy is dependent on the “Holy Spirit who dwells in the saints,” or, perhaps more concretely, “Mother Church . . . offers them her maternal heart and lips so that they may be initiated in the sacred mysteries, because they cannot yet believe unto righteousness with their own heart or make profession with their own lips unto salvation.”³⁷

While Augustine’s position—that infants are destined for hellfire and only Christian baptism can ensure them a place in heaven—certainly appears harsh when compared to the high premium that the Pelagians placed on infant innocence, it must be considered in broader theological context. In short, since Augustine is convinced that infants share in the guilt of original sin, only the work of Christ as made effective in baptism can establish their salvation.³⁸ Furthermore, it is precisely the notion of a universally shared guilt for original

35. Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 294: Preached in the Basilica of the Ancestors on the Birthday of the Martyr Guddens on 27 June (on the Baptism of Infants, against the Pelagians),” in *Sermons (273–305a)*, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994), §2; 182.

36. Augustine of Hippo, “The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Little Ones,” in *Answer to the Pelagians*, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), §1.24.

37. Augustine of Hippo, “Letter 98: Augustine to Boniface,” in *Letters, 1–99*, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001), §5; 430; Augustine, “Punishment and Forgiveness,” §1.25. Louis Villette comments that the church’s faith is of paramount importance for Augustine’s understanding of the sacraments, even if he does not often discuss it: see Louis Villette, *Foi et Sacrement*, 2 vols. (Paris: Bloud et Gey, 1959–64), 1:324–25. Johnson notes the possible influence of Roman contract law on the notion in Augustine’s work and Latin baptismal theology more generally that understands the faith of parents or the church as standing surety for infant baptizands: see Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 197.

sin that is at stake in this argument about infant baptism. One must understand that Augustine is the trailblazer here. He is developing a strand of thought already present in Latin theology, to be sure, but he is taking it further than the tradition had yet done.³⁹ Furthermore, the strand he picks up is not necessarily the dominant strand. The prevailing understanding of original sin, especially in Greek theology but also attested in Latin theology, was that original sin introduced a corruption into human existence. This corruption turns one away from God and the good, and must be combated through development of a virtuous life with God's help, but it does not itself establish one as guilty before God. For Augustine, on the other hand, "original sin . . . always means at the same time original guilt."⁴⁰

Augustine's logic in this movement from original sin to original guilt depends on a corruption in the text of Romans 5:12. This corruption suggested to Augustine that all are afflicted by Adam's sin because of their actual presence in Adam.⁴¹ Armed with this biblical passage, and contrary to the Pelagians' belief that original sin is passed to all humanity through imitation, Augustine argued that original sin affects all humanity because all humanity was physically present in Adam when he sinned just as a leaf is in the root long before it appears. The mechanism that controls how this transmission occurs is "the hidden corruption of carnal concupiscence."⁴² Through Adam's sin the sexual act became inextricably linked with carnal lust. The hallmark of this condition is involuntary sexual arousal, which Augustine calls the "disobedience of the flesh" and understands as "something embarrassing for us." It is "the result of the weakness which we merited by sinning, and is called the sin dwelling in our

38. See the excellent discussion in William Harmless, "Christ the Pediatrician: Infant Baptism and Christological Imagery in the Pelagian Controversy," *Augustinian Studies* 28, no. 2 (1997).

39. It is important to remember here that Augustine builds on a North African liturgical tradition that included baptismal exorcisms, which undoubtedly impacted his thinking about baptism and original sin. Augustine was not a marginal theological innovator; rather, he engaged in creative and constructive work rooted deeply within his tradition. On the importance of the exorcisms for Augustine in this regard, see Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, 65–66.

40. Bernhard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine: From the First Century to the Present* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 114. See also Jean-Claude Larchet, "Ancestral Guilt According to St Maximus the Confessor: A Bridge between Eastern and Western Conceptions," *Sobornost* 20, no. 1 (1998): 26–27.

41. NASB: "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, *because all sinned*" (italics added). Augustine's text: "Through one man sin entered into the world—and through sin death; and thus it passed into all men—in *whom all sinned*" (italics added). Augustine, "Sermon 294," §15; 191.

42. Augustine, "Punishment and Forgiveness," §1.10; 39.

members.”⁴³ Original sin brings with it the state of guilt because sin dwelling in our flesh ensures that the fruit of such a tainted sexual union is likewise tainted. This taint is not mere inclination toward sin but the actual condition of sin insofar as one is born with “disobedience of the flesh.” So Augustine, speaking of newborn infants: “the sinful flesh of those through whom they are born gives them a guilt which they have not yet contracted in their own life.”⁴⁴

Thusly did Augustine join original guilt to original sin by means of infant baptism. Infants are baptized, and this must be done for a reason. The only intelligible reason is that they are in need of the forgiveness from sin that baptism brings. But, since infants have not yet committed any sins of volition, we must look elsewhere for the source of their guilt. This source is found in their birth and in the network of sexual reproduction that stretches from each person back to Adam and Eve. Given such an account of sin, Augustine was able to advance against the Pelagians a robust account of grace and predestination as that which rescues an individual from their hopelessly guilty state.

Infant baptism was practiced *in extremis* in the early Christian centuries, but it was always something of a practice in search of a theology. By pressing it into service in his dispute with the Pelagians, Augustine “provided the theology that led to infant baptism becoming general practice for the first time in the history of the church.”⁴⁵ This was not his intent. In fact, he argued that it was already the church’s general practice, and had been since the time of the apostles. Other sources considered above belie this claim. Further, the logic of his argument moved away from the practice of infant baptism and toward the establishment of his doctrine of original sin and guilt. However, once “original sin was established as the basic framework for thinking, then it was natural for it to become the principal reason for infant baptism.”⁴⁶ This resulted in infant baptism quickly becoming established as a standard practice—and, indeed, the definitive form of baptism—rather than an *in extremis* concession. As Karen Spierling notes, “infant baptism was an established practice of the Christian church” within one hundred years of Augustine’s dispute with the Pelagians.⁴⁷

In this way, Augustine provided Christian theology with the first of its two great arguments in support of infant baptism, namely, the sacramental argument: all humans are sinners in need of salvation, and the sacraments in

43. *Ibid.*, §2.22; 105.

44. *Ibid.*, §3.2; 123.

45. David F. Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism? An Enquiry at the End of Christendom*, Didsbury Lectures, 2003 (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 12.

46. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 816.

general and baptism in particular are the appointed means for removing sin and securing salvation, therefore infants ought to receive baptism lest they die in their sins. This argument, and Barth's rejection of it, is the subject of further consideration in chapter two.

REFORMATION CHANGES

The sacramental argument for infant baptism reigned in theology for a thousand years, until the Protestant Reformation. While the reformers did not entirely reject the sacramental soteriology that undergirded the sacramental argument for infant baptism, as I will discuss in chapter two, they did make certain soteriological modifications that undermined Augustine's synthesis. A brief look at the primary reformers of Wittenberg, Zürich, and Geneva will provide a feel for what happened to infant baptism during the Reformation.

Of these three, Martin Luther departed least from Augustine, although without appeal to the church's faith as surety for the infant's. Rather, he argues that Christ "is himself the baptizer" and "since . . . he is present, speaks, and baptizes, why should not his Word and baptism call forth spirit and faith in the child?"⁴⁸ As far as the legitimacy of infant baptism is concerned, Luther is nonplused by arguments from the Reformation's radical wing. Unlike the radicals, who were convinced that a scriptural warrant must be found for every church practice, Luther is willing to give tradition the benefit of the doubt—provided that tradition is sufficiently ancient and scripture does not explicitly call for reform.⁴⁹ Since scripture nowhere indisputably rejects infant baptism, and since Luther follows Augustine in tracing the practice back to the apostles, Luther sees no reason to follow the radicals in rejecting it.

Zwingli takes a very different tack than Luther in retaining infant baptism, although there were moments earlier in his reforming career when it might have looked as though he was moving toward its rejection.⁵⁰ To begin, he denies the notion that infants are born with guilt from original sin, reverting

47. Karen E. Spierling, *Infant Baptism in Reformation Geneva: The Shaping of a Community, 1536-1564* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 36. Peter Cramer notes that there seems to have been some resistance to adopting Augustine's arguments concerning infant baptism precisely insofar as they depended upon his view of original sin: see Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, C. 200–C. 1150*, ed. D. E. Luscombe, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 131–32. This further highlights how the history of infant baptism is dynamic and diverse, rather than static and standardized. One must further remember, of course, that Augustine had very little direct impact on the theology and practice of the Eastern, Greek-speaking church that—nonetheless—came also in a more gradual and organic way to standardize the practice of infant baptism. The present discussion is thus situated in a particularly Western theological constellation.

back to something like the regnant fourth-century position. With this move, Zwingli undermines the Augustinian synthesis that supported the sacramental argument for infant baptism. In the preface to his work on original sin, Zwingli is dismissive of Augustine's achievement:

For what could be said more briefly and plainly than that original sin is not sin but disease, and that the children of Christians are not condemned to eternal punishment on account of that disease? On the other hand, what could be said more feebly or more at variance with the canonical Scriptures than that this disaster was relieved by the water of baptism . . . and that it was not only a disease but even a crime?⁵¹

Zwingli's comments here hint at another important move that he will make, namely, rejecting the assumption that external things are able to accomplish

48. Martin Luther, "Concerning Rebaptism: A Letter of Martin Luther to Two Pastors," in *Luther's Works: Church and Ministry*, 2, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 242–43. It deserves mention that this notion of Jesus Christ as the one who baptizes regardless of the human minister involved goes back at least as far as Augustine: see Augustine of Hippo, "Homilies on the Gospel of John," in *St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), §6.7; 41. Returning to Luther, Paul Althaus provides a discussion of Luther's development on the question of infant baptism and faith, arguing that Luther moves from an emphasis on reception of baptism by faith, to a middle period where he posits some form of infant faith, and then back to an emphasis on faithful reception where infants are expected to grow into their faith: see Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 364–70. Bernhard Lohse's more recent treatment affirms that while Luther seems to have grown more circumspect about this line of thinking, "there is indication that even the mature Luther retained the idea of the *fides infantium*." Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 305. Regardless of how one sorts out these matters, Johnson's judgment remains correct: "Luther was, above everything else, a theologian of baptism." Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 317.

49. Luther, "Concerning Rebaptism," 241.

50. For an introduction to Zwingli's developing doctrine of baptism, see W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 85–93. One of Zwingli's primary points of reference in developing his doctrine of baptism was the Reformation's radical wing. Jonathan Rainbow gives a helpful introduction to Zwingli's treatment of baptism with such a context in mind: see Jonathan H. Rainbow, "'Confessor Baptism': The Baptismal Doctrine of the Early Anabaptists," *American Baptist Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1989): esp. 282–84.

51. Ulrich Zwingli, "Declaration of Huldreich Zwingli Regarding Original Sin, Addressed to Urbanus Rhegius," in *On Providence and Other Essays*, ed. William John Hinke (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 3. See also the discussion in Spinks, *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From Luther to Contemporary Practices* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 32–33.

spiritual effects like the forgiveness of sins. He sees this as a contrast between the New Testament and the Old Testament, where the latter relied on external mediation that was then abolished by Jesus Christ. Thus not baptism but “only Jesus Christ and no external thing can take away the sins of us Christians.”⁵²

This is the critical moment. With Augustine’s synthesis undermined, and with it the sacramental argument for infant baptism, what reason—if any—could be found in scripture for maintaining infant baptism? Zwingli found his reason in appeal to the category of “covenant” and to the sacraments as “covenant signs.” Then, because “he could not point to a specific baptism of a child in the Bible, he argued instead that infant baptism was a sign of the same covenant with God that circumcision had marked in the Old Testament.”⁵³ In this way, Zwingli provided Christian theology with the second of its two great arguments in support of infant baptism, namely, the covenantal argument. God has established a covenant with God’s people and children born to Christian parents are included in this covenant just as were children born to the Israelites. Such infants ought to receive baptism as a sign of the covenant in the same way that infant sons received circumcision as the sign of the covenant. Such an argument has the further benefit, especially on the Reformed side, of having scriptural passages that appear to support it. Chapter three will further consider Barth’s rejection of this covenantal argument for infant baptism.

Calvin consolidates and deepens the covenantal argument for infant baptism. He differs from Zwingli by tempering the latter’s distaste for “external things,” granting that they can serve as instruments or ministers of the Holy Spirit’s work (see *Inst.*, 4.14.9). He also accepts Augustine’s account of original sin and guilt, unlike Zwingli, albeit without Augustine’s mechanics of transmission (see *Inst.*, 2.1.5–7). Such minor adjustments aside, Calvin does not change the reformational picture substantially. The reforms that Calvin

52. Ulrich Zwingli, “Of Baptism” in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 131.

53. Spierling, *Infant Baptism in Reformation Geneva*, 44. In Zwingli, see Zwingli, “Of Baptism,” 138–39. See also the discussion in Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 120–29. Old’s broader discussion situates Zwingli’s contribution within the collective response of the early Swiss reformational theologians to the proposals of the more radical element. Finally, and to be entirely fair, it must be said that Augustine does use the analogy to circumcision and thus an inchoate covenantal argument in his support of infant baptism: see Augustine, “Punishment and Forgiveness,” §2.25; 107–8. There is also a brief allusion to circumcision in the early Jewish-Christian *Odes of Solomon*, which may or may not have been associated with baptism: see Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, 17–18. However, this argument seems to have played only an allusive role in early theologies of baptism: see Wright, “The Origins of Infant Baptism—Child Believers’ Baptism?,” in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, 18–19.

was able to enact at Geneva do reveal a decisive break with the Augustinian synthesis surrounding infant baptism, however. For instance, Calvin rejects the practice of emergency baptism because baptism is neither necessary for salvation nor capable of saving apart from faith. Consequently, he forbids women (and unordained men) from performing baptisms since he does not countenance the supposedly extraordinary circumstances that previously demanded emergency baptism for infants (see *Inst.*, 4.15.20–1). As Spierling notes, Geneva’s “Consistory and Council repeatedly insisted that midwives should not baptise infants.”⁵⁴

Of particular interest is how Calvin’s doctrine of baptism provides an especially instructive look at the inherent tension within all reformational doctrines of infant baptism. For both Luther and Calvin, and the mainline of the Reformation as it proceeded from them, baptism is only effective to accomplish what it is said to accomplish insofar as it is joined with faith. This pushed both Luther and Calvin to make assertions about the possibility of faith in infants, as well as to argue that those baptized must later fulfill their baptism with faith.⁵⁵ The status of such affirmations is not important here. But they do reveal that for all the bluster in support of infant baptism against the Reformation’s radical wing, the affirmation of infant baptism—at least in the form it then assumed—is not a self-evident conclusion for Protestant theology.

Calvin’s doctrine of baptism provides a particularly insightful picture of this state of affairs. Because Calvin’s doctrine is consistent with his broader sacramentology and his theology as a whole, Wright’s charge of “incoherence” is overblown.⁵⁶ A tension obtains between Calvin’s doctrine of baptism and his affirmation of infant baptism, however. His emphasis on the necessity of faith’s presence in order to receive the benefits that baptism exhibits—for instance, “we obtain only as much as we receive in faith” (*Inst.*, 4.15.15)—could lead one who is alive to the concerns of the Reformation’s radical wing to conclude that

54. Spierling, *Infant Baptism in Reformation Geneva*, 220. Of course, the fact that the Genevan citizens required reminding about this point underscores the difficulty of changing established practices surrounding and thinking about infant baptism.

55. As to the former, see the “seed” of faith language in *Inst.*, 4.16.20, and Luther, “Concerning Rebaptism,” 42–43. As to the latter, see *ibid.*, 249 and *Inst.*, 4.16.21. Ronald Wallace suggests an interesting possibility here with reference to Calvin, namely, that “there is no thought of Baptism as implanting a small seed of eternal life in the heart of a child which might later burst forth and increase. It is the *Baptism* that is the seed. It is in the fact of having been baptised that the future potentiality lies, and not in the heart of the baptized person.” Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 190. Given the broader context of Calvin’s thought, such an interpretation might ultimately reduce to a social—which is to say, covenantal—argument concerning infant baptism such as I will discuss in due course.

Calvin has adult baptism exclusively in mind. Indeed, Calvin recognized this danger in the first edition of his *Institutes*, where infant baptism is relegated to a single concluding section in his larger doctrine of baptism: “But . . . it has been said that there are two parts to the use of the sacrament: first, to instruct us in the Lord’s promises; secondly, for us to confess our faith among men. It could then be doubted why the children of Christians are baptized while as yet infants who seem incapable of being taught anything . . . nor do they seem to have inwardly conceived a faith to which they can give outward testimony.”⁵⁷ He then proceeds to offer a few inchoate and relatively disorganized arguments in favor of the practice, dominated by a discussion of the point that we cannot know for certain that infants do not have a form of faith, and concluding with a brief appeal to the covenantal argument through an oblique reference to the analogy from circumcision. Calvin’s primary argument for navigating the question of faith and baptism in infants is to say that the sign of baptism and the faith that receives that sign may be temporally separated, which is to say that the promise inherent in an infant’s baptism reaches fulfillment when they later come to faith (see *Inst.*, 4.16.21).

In 1536, then, infant baptism is something of an afterthought to baptism proper in Calvin’s treatment, and he recognizes that it might not seem to follow from the preceding material. This section was expanded considerably in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*, and it remained relatively free from revision except for the later addition of material against Servetus. Although the sentences quoted above disappear after the 1536 edition, Calvin now calls his discussion of infant baptism “an appendix” (*Inst.*, 4.16.1) aimed at refuting the radicals. The timing for this concern to combat the Reformation’s radical wing fits well with Calvin’s biographical chronology. While Geneva had relatively few encounters with radicals promoting rebaptism, the 1539 *Institutes* was finished during Calvin’s time at Strasbourg between his two Geneva periods. Strasbourg

56. To his credit, Wright also uses the language of “apparent incoherence.” Wright, “Development and Coherence in Calvin’s *Institutes*: The Case of Baptism (*Institutes* 4:15–4:16),” in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, 235. Jill Raitt has shown that Calvin’s doctrine of infant baptism is governed by three principles common to his sacramentology and with roots in his broader theology: see Jill Raitt, “Three Inter-Related Principles in Calvin’s Unique Doctrine of Infant Baptism,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 11, no. 1 (1980). These principles are: [1] “Christ and his benefits are distinct but not separate,” [2] “Christ and his benefits are offered to all but received only by those gifted with faith by the Holy Spirit,” and [3] “the mind illumined by the Holy Spirit through the gift of faith is stimulated by the Word and the analogy presented in sacramental action” (51–52).

57. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, ed. and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 101.

had a considerable radical presence, and we know that Calvin interacted with them because he successfully “converted” at least two of them—Jean Stordeur and his wife, Idelette de Bure. Calvin would later marry Idelette after Jean’s death left her a widow with children to care for.⁵⁸

Calvin rearranged his discussion of infant baptism in the final Latin edition of 1559, treating it in a separate chapter following his discussion of baptism proper.⁵⁹ Calvin eventually established a parallel architectural disconnect to mirror the material disconnect that he recognized between his discussion of baptism in general and that of infant baptism in particular. The tension here would remain dormant in the short term. Reformed theology in the centuries after Calvin continued to build up the covenantal argument for infant baptism, such that “covenant began to be the overriding theological concept” in their doctrines and liturgies of baptism.⁶⁰ However, the tension would eventually bubble to the surface of Protestant theology.

PROTESTANT CRISIS OF INFANT BAPTISM

If Reformed theology held the line in the centuries following Calvin with respect to the covenantal argument for infant baptism—as, indeed, it generally does still today—the Reformation’s radical wing persisted in their incredulity toward this argument, practicing instead the baptism of those who had reached a responsible age and made a confession of faith. As Spierling puts it, the radical wing felt as though people like Zwingli and Calvin had “betrayed the Reformation,” or at least failed to take it far enough, “by accepting infant baptism.”⁶¹ History would eventually supply them with the opportunity to strike back against the new theological synthesis supporting infant baptism. Their impact would be felt only indirectly, however, and as mediated by the later pietist movement—especially as represented by the Moravian HERNHUTTERS, descended from the community established by Count Zinzendorf in the early eighteenth century.⁶²

58. See Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, trans. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 139–40; Spierling, *Infant Baptism in Reformation Geneva*, 52. For a material analysis of Calvin’s engagement with the Reformation’s radical wing in the baptism section of his 1539 *Institutes*, see Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 101–8. Balke also provides a detailed discussion of Calvin’s contact with radicals at Strasbourg (see 127–33), as well as his relationship with Idelette as surveyed from this perspective (see 133–38).

59. See Ford Lewis Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, ed. Robert Benedetto (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 156.

60. Spinks, *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, 63.

61. Spierling, *Infant Baptism in Reformation Geneva*, 33.

Friedrich Schleiermacher, the premier Reformed theologian of his age, was heavily influenced by this Moravian brand of pietism.⁶³ Both his father and grandfather spent time as preachers in a Reformed pietist sect, and he was educated in the Moravian institutions at Niesky and Barby. While at the latter institution, Schleiermacher rebelled against what he felt were the movement's stifling orthodoxies and championed freedom for critical thought. However, he remained able in his later life to make that famous statement, "I have become a Moravian again, but of a higher order."⁶⁴ Decisively for my argument, Schleiermacher also raised serious questions against infant baptism, declaring that "it would have been quite intelligible if, to recover touch with Christ's institution, infant baptism had been abolished at the Reformation."⁶⁵ How is it that he comes to such a conclusion?

Schleiermacher begins *The Christian Faith* by borrowing freely from the disciplines of ethics, religious studies, and apologetics in order to articulate precisely what his project will be. He develops his account of the feeling of absolute dependence by borrowing from ethics. Schleiermacher arrives at this conception through an analysis of consciousness. The feeling of absolute dependence is concerned with what consciousness presupposes rather than with what consciousness perceives. It is, then, what undergirds all self-consciousness as the awareness that the activity of our self-consciousness—and, indeed, that self-consciousness itself—"comes from a source outside of us."⁶⁶ The "whence" of our feeling of absolute dependence is God, and Schleiermacher affirms the identity of this awareness of absolute dependence with awareness of being in relationship with God. But they are only identical in a manner of speaking. The sensible self-consciousness is divided up into distinct moments in time,

62. "Historically, Pietism emerged when much of the zeal had departed from the Anabaptist movement, flourishing best on Anabaptist soil and finding strength in Anabaptists strongholds. . . . The common people often used the names Pietists and Anabaptists synonymously." Further, "Anabaptism and Pietism shared the desire to carry the Reformation to its logical conclusion." Dale W. Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 19–20.

63. For the following, see James M. Brandt, *All Things New: Reform of Church and Society in Schleiermacher's Christian Ethics*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 41–46.

64. Although often quoted without citation, Barth traces this comment to a letter from Schleiermacher to G. Reimer on April 20, 1802: see Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923/24*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 79.

65. Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), §138.2; 637.

66. *Ibid.*, §4.3; 16.

but the feeling of absolute dependence is not. Thus the feeling of absolute dependence can come to expression as various divergent religious emotions in different moments of the sensible self-consciousness. Indeed, the feeling of absolute dependence only finds expression in conjunction with the sensible self-consciousness, and this unity is, according to Schleiermacher, “the consummating point of the self-consciousness.”⁶⁷

Religious diversity is the result of this conjunction of the feeling of absolute dependence with sensible self-consciousness. Each religion shares basic religious God-consciousness, i.e., the feeling of absolute dependence. But the feeling of absolute dependence comes to expression in various modes as it interacts with the sensible self-consciousness of a particular culture. “The same thing is present in all, but present in a quite different way in each.”⁶⁸ This does not imply a kind of basic natural theology beneath the surface of each religion, however, because there is no pure expression of the feeling of absolute dependence; it only finds expression in the various forms of sensible self-consciousness that we call the religions. Christianity “is essentially distinguished . . . by the fact that in it everything is related to redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶⁹ Jesus is the decisive factor of the sensible self-consciousness in relation to which Christianity is an expression of the feeling of absolute dependence.

For Schleiermacher, the decisive thing about Jesus Christ is his “absolutely powerful God-consciousness.”⁷⁰ God-consciousness is inextricably linked with sensible self-consciousness, which means it is confronted by the vicissitudes of our daily lives. The various stimuli we encounter ought to serve as occasions for the positive development of our God-consciousness, that is, as opportunities to deepen our communion with God. However, they can also serve as occasions for the degradation of our communion with God should we fail—to a greater or lesser degree—to register this positive development. Decisively for the Christian, the prospect of this positive development has a christological character since “in the actual life of the Christian . . . there is no general God-consciousness which has not bound up with it a relation to Christ.”⁷¹

So developing a Christian God-consciousness depends on being related to Jesus Christ in some way. What sort of relation is this? In fine, it is one of historically transmitted attraction. Jesus’ perfected God-consciousness is attractive, and it affected his first followers in such a way as to decisively

67. *Ibid.*, §5.3; 21.

68. *Ibid.*, §10.2; 45.

69. *Ibid.*, §11, thesis statement; 52.

70. *Ibid.*, §94.2; 387.

71. *Ibid.*, §62.3; 261.

determine their God-consciousness. Such determination is what it means to say that one knows Christ as one's redeemer. Further, this attraction continues even today through the ministry of the church: "the self-revelation of Christ is now mediated by those who preach him; but they being appropriated by Him as His instruments, the activity really proceeds from Him and is essentially His own."⁷² This is the case because Christian proclamation consists of a report about the attractiveness of Christ's God-consciousness or its impact on those whose own God-consciousness has been determined by Christ's. In such proclamation, the attractiveness of Christ's God-consciousness is presented to the hearer.⁷³

The church is the society of those whose God-consciousness has been decisively determined by Christ's. Just as Christian proclamation can be regarded as Christ's self-proclamation, the sacraments can be understood as his self-communication. To map this twofold aspect onto baptism, therein an individual is received into the society of the church on the one hand, and into living fellowship with Christ on the other. That is, the individual becomes a member of the social group convened on the basis of a shared determination of the God-consciousness. Given this twofold aspect, the decisive issue is determining when the church ought to administer baptism to an individual. Schleiermacher is not concerned with the dynamics of such decision making, and is content to accept that "the inclination of the Church to baptize will sometimes run ahead of the inward workings of the Spirit for regeneration and sometimes lag behind them."⁷⁴ In other words, there will always be some unbaptized regenerates, and some baptized unregenerates.

Schleiermacher's account of infant baptism builds on this point. Baptism's efficacy depends on the confluence of the two aspects treated in the above paragraph. If reception into the church does not correspond with entering into fellowship with Christ, baptism is ineffectual. The only circumstance lacking this correspondence is when baptism "is imparted prematurely, before the work of preaching is complete and has awakened faith."⁷⁵ That is, baptism is ineffectual if the church receives the individual into itself prior to the decisive determination of such a one's God-consciousness by Jesus Christ. This is what

72. *Ibid.*, §108.5; 490–91. This is a highly sacramental account of Christian proclamation, which puts one in mind of Barth in *CD I/1*.

73. As John Riggs puts it, "through the church Christ himself still evoked and shaped the 'feeling of absolute dependence,' which for Christians was known only in the experience of redemption through Christ." John W. Riggs, *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: A Historical and Practical Theology*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 92.

74. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §136.3; 623.

75. *Ibid.*, §137.2; 630.

occurs in infant baptism. The distinction between ineffectual baptism and invalid baptism is important here, where the former pertains to the absence of the material significance of the rite while the latter pertains to the formal correctness of its administration. For Schleiermacher, infant baptism is ineffectual even if valid: “infant baptism is the same as any other baptism which has erroneously been imparted prior to the full faith of the person baptized and yet is valid; . . . its proper efficacy is suspended until the person baptized has really become a believer.”⁷⁶

It is only by means of confirmation that baptism is consummated and becomes effectual. At this point, both reception into the church and entrance into fellowship with Christ are real for the individual baptized as an infant. Attentive readers will recognize Calvin’s basic pattern at work here: the baptismal sign is administered to infants prior to their confession of faith, and it becomes an effective sign when they come to faith. There is an important difference between Schleiermacher and Calvin on this point, however. Calvin thinks that baptism ought to be administered to infants because of his commitment to the covenantal argument, while Schleiermacher rejects this argument. In his estimation, the various Reformed confessional documents from which he worked “undertake to vindicate [infant baptism] . . . but they do so ineffectively.”⁷⁷ Schleiermacher explicates the logic at work in these confessional accounts of infant baptism in relation to faith, but his heart is not in it. The rhetorical force of his treatment is something like the following: “My church’s confessional documents support infant baptism so I will do my best to make sense of that, but there is no intrinsic reason why we must support it. In fact, it would make much more sense if we did not!” Thus it is that Schleiermacher arrived at the conviction noted above: “it would have been quite intelligible if . . . infant baptism had been abolished at the Reformation.”⁷⁸

Despite the critical apparatus that ensconces Schleiermacher’s theology, his conclusion on the question of infant baptism amounts to little more than recognition of the tension inherent in Calvin’s treatment coupled with a willingness to expose that tension. It should come as no surprise, then, that approximately one hundred years later two intrepid Reformed theologians, both of whom had studied Schleiermacher carefully even if they do not take him as their starting point, should once again give voice to this tension.⁷⁹ However,

76. *Ibid.*, §138.2; 636. See Barth’s similar stance on this point, discussed below. The distinction between valid sacramental administration and sacramental efficacy traces back at least to Augustine’s involvement in the Donatist controversy: see Lohse, *Short History of Christian Doctrine*, 137–38.

77. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §138.1; 635.

78. *Ibid.*, §138.2; 637.

historical events like the First World War served to alert these theologians to new concerns. For both these thinkers, that conflict and its aftermath shattered the notion of Christendom, that is, the assumption that Western peoples and cultures are inherently Christian. This assumption made sense of infant baptism in both Calvin and Schleiermacher insofar as they were able to assume on the basis of brute social fact that those who were baptized as infants would remain within the church as adults, that—to use more theological language—they would later fulfill their baptisms with faith. But as Emil Brunner notes, it becomes more difficult to make this assumption

in the instances where persons who had been baptized as infants and therefore were included in the covenant of God arrived at the power of making their own decisions and turned their backs on the church and the Christian faith. Most of the contemporary neopagans and also most members of atheistic societies have been baptized as infants; what does the grace of Baptism, of which in any event they probably never even heard, mean for them? What does the fact of having been baptized mean for the large number of contemporary people who do not know and do not even care to know whether they have been baptized? Infant Baptism, which has its good points in an entirely Christian fellowship—that is to say, a fellowship of persons who all joyfully profess Jesus Christ as their Lord—becomes a highly questionable arrangement where it is requested more from consideration of custom than from conviction of faith.⁸⁰

Brunner's comments, which originated as the Olaus Petri Lectures of 1937, give voice to the difficulty that was felt in the early twentieth century. Given

79. For Brunner and Barth's Schleiermacher credentials, see Emil Brunner, *Die Mystik und das Wort: Der Gegensatz zwischen moderner Religionsauffassung und christlichem Glauben dargestellt an der Theologie Schleiermachers* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1928); Barth, *Theology of Schleiermacher*. For an account of twentieth-century Reformed theology's baptismal crisis from an American perspective, see John H. Leith, "The Crisis in the Theology and Practice of Baptism," *Reformed Review* 31, no. 1 (1977). For a lengthier and more detailed account, situated within a broader ecumenical outlook, see Dale Moody, *Baptism: Foundation for Christian Unity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 45–112. It should be noted that Leith is in a position to consider Barth's final statement on baptism in *CD IV/4*, whereas Moody is limited to his earlier texts. For a discussion of Barth and Brunner as they factor in the wider Protestant discussion about baptism's status as a sacrament, and the possibility of infant baptism, see Kalman L. Sulyok, *A Theological Consideration of Baptism as Act of Discipleship and Confession of Faith*, A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Theology (Princeton, 1956), 169–93.

the collapse of the social structures that rendered infant baptism intelligible, Brunner concluded that “the contemporary practice of infant Baptism can hardly be regarded as being anything short of scandalous.”⁸¹

The solution for which the times seemed to call was a return to responsible baptism, and here Karl Barth led the way. Although he had earlier held to the standard Reformed line on infant baptism, his mind changed by mid-1938. At that time he reported arriving at “completely negative conclusions over Calvin’s arguments for infant baptism.”⁸² This change bore fruit in a lecture to a gathering of Swiss theological students at Gwatt am Thunersee on May 7, 1943. He published the lecture five years later under the title, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*.⁸³

What doctrine of baptism does Barth advance in this lecture? Eberhard Jüngel explicates this material under five admirably succinct points. First, “Baptism has a portraying, attesting and—in the sense of attestation—imitating,

80. Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, trans. Amandus W. Loos and David Cairns (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 183–84. Dietrich Bonhoeffer corroborates this concern over indiscriminate baptism practiced by the remnants of Christendom in this period, bemoaning the cheapness of grace under such conditions: “We gave away preaching and sacraments cheaply; we performed baptism and confirmations; we absolved an entire people, unquestioned and unconditionally. . . . We poured out rivers of grace without end, but the call to rigorously follow Christ was seldom heard. . . . When was the world ever Christianized more dreadfully and wickedly than here? What do the three thousand Saxons whose bodies Charlemagne killed compare with the millions of souls being killed today?” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, vol. 4, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 53–54.

81. Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, 185. Brunner later took a less hostile approach to infant baptism, although he maintained and expanded his criticisms of the social conditions that supplied its cogency. In the early 1960s, he affirmed infant baptism based on the way it “points to Him, His grace which precedes all preaching and faith,” as well as to some aspects of the covenantal argument. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consumation*, trans. David Cairns and T. H. L. Parker, vol. 3, *Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 57.

82. Barth makes this comment in a letter dated September 1, 1938, as quoted in Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 286. Mark Husbans provides a helpful discussion of how Barth’s doctrine of baptism developed prior to the 1940s. He argues that Barth’s views on baptism in this period are generally Reformed, albeit with a steadily increasing concern for how baptism relates to moral responsibility: see Mark A. Husbans, “Barth’s Ethics of Prayer: A Study in Moral Ontology and Action” (Toronto: University of St. Michael’s College, 2005), 171–86. Also, Daniel Migliore sketches a typology of Barth’s development on this doctrine, which I have worked to flesh out elsewhere: see Daniel L. Migliore, “Reforming the Theology and Practice of Baptism: The Challenge of Karl Barth,” in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, ed. David Willis and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); W. Travis McMaken, “Authority, Mission, and Institution: A Systematic Consideration of Matthew 28.18–20 in Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Baptism,” *Ecclesiology* 5 (2009).

symbolic, signifying function.”⁸⁴ It is an image of the salvation history that occurs between God and humanity in Jesus Christ, and not itself that which it attests. Second, the power of baptism does not reside within baptism itself or within the faith of the one being baptized. Rather, it resides within Jesus Christ. Jüngel clarifies this notion in five subpoints, the sum of which is that baptism has the necessity of a command, but that baptism is not a necessary or indispensable means of salvation. Third, “baptism is an exclusively cognitive event” that “seals” or reinforces subjectively the truth of the objective reality it attests.⁸⁵ It is not a causal or generative event creating that reality. Fourth, the administration of baptism ought to be characterized by responsibility, both on the side of the church and on the side of the baptizand. Although the power of baptism cannot be questioned because that power is located in Jesus Christ, deficient baptismal order can lead to subjective questioning of baptism’s meaning. Baptismal order must be reformed for this reason, and that means—among other things—the abrogation of infant baptism. Fifth and finally, baptism’s effectiveness resides neither within its administrator nor its receiver, but within Jesus Christ. Baptism possesses the character of an eschatological sign that determines and equips the one who has been baptized.⁸⁶

83. Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, trans. Ernest A. Payne (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006). It is interesting to note that Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a position paper on the question of infant baptism the year before Barth’s lecture. Bonhoeffer recognizes the call for responsible baptism as a recurrent theme of protest when the church succumbs to secularization, but he relativizes the urge with a blunt reflection: “Never has this rallying cry renewed the church.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “A Theological Position Paper on the Question of Baptism, 1942,” in *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940–1945*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 567. He further notes how some—Brunner is not mentioned here but Bonhoeffer might have seen his work; Barth’s work along these lines had not yet become public—improperly associate infant baptism with the Constantinian *corpus Christianum* since infant baptism pre-dated Constantine (see 567–68). Bonhoeffer’s point here is significantly undermined insofar as more recent research suggests that infant baptism did not become a churchwide standard practice until after Augustine, as I recounted earlier in this chapter. All this notwithstanding, Bonhoeffer is clearly alive to the problem of the church’s secularization and baptism’s role in that process, even if he proposes a different solution—namely, “a correct Protestant baptismal discipline” (571).

84. Eberhard Jüngel, “Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe: Ein Hinweis auf ihre Probleme,” in *Barth-Studien* (Zürich: Benziger, 1982), 249. In his thesis statement, Barth calls baptism the “representation”—*Abbild*, which might also be translated as “image” or “copy”—“of man’s renewal through his participation by means of the power of the Holy Spirit in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Barth, *Baptism*, 9.

85. Jüngel, “Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe,” 251. So Barth, “Baptism testifies to a man that this event is not his fancy but is objective reality which no power on earth can alter and which God has pledged Himself to maintain in all circumstances.” Barth, *Baptism*, 14.

This much is clear from Jüngel's explication: in this essay, Barth takes an approach similar to Schleiermacher's with reference to the inherent tension in Calvin's legacy on the doctrine of baptism. Barth wants to maintain that baptism is an instrument of Christ and the Holy Spirit employed for the strengthening of our faith, which Barth casts as "cognitive" here in a way that is perhaps more reductive than Calvin would have liked.⁸⁷ Like Schleiermacher, Barth maintains that faith is necessary for baptism to be effective even if it is valid when faith is absent, although Barth jumbles the terminology a bit because he ties baptism's objective aspect, the question of efficacy, to the operation of Christ and the Holy Spirit rather than to the confluence of ritual and faith: "Baptism without the willingness and readiness of the baptized is true, effectual and effective baptism, but it is not correct; it is not done in obedience, it is not administered according to proper order, and therefore it is necessarily clouded baptism."⁸⁸ Thus while infant baptism is valid, or complete in a formal or objective sense, it is improper insofar as it is deficient in the subjective sense of being irresponsible—this "willingness" and "readiness" is not present in the baptizand.

Note that Barth does not describe the subjective defect merely as a lack of faith, although this is certainly included. Instead, he describes it as a lack of active commitment. This raises the question of to what Barth wants the baptizand to be committed, and bumps up against the organizing factor of much of this essay—namely, mission. Like Brunner, Barth thinks that Christendom has begun to fall apart. Also like Brunner, he recognizes in Christendom the social conditions that made sense of the Reformed doctrine of baptism:⁸⁹

86. Jüngel, "Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe," 49–52. Barth expands on this notion of an "eschatological sign": "the appearance of the reality which it denotes will occur in and with the appearance of Jesus Christ as the goal and end of the period begun with His resurrection"; it designates the baptizand as one whose death and life occur in Christ's death and resurrection, and therefore as one for whom "there is no other past and no other future beneath this sign." Barth, *Baptism*, 62–63.

87. One must remember, however, that Barth later characterizes Calvin's position as involving a "cognitive sacramentalism" ["*kognitiven Sakramentalismus*"] (*CD* IV/4, 130; *KD* IV/4, 142). The term is certainly applicable as a description of Barth's position in this 1943 essay.

88. Barth, *Baptism*, 40; see also the discussions on 35 and 56–57. I will cite this work parenthetically for the remainder of this section.

89. Jürgen Fangmeier agrees that the Christendom issue was very important for Barth on the question of baptism: see Jürgen Fangmeier, "Die Praxis der Taufe nach Karl Barth," in *Warum Christen ihre Kinder nicht mehr taufen lassen*, ed. Dieter Schellong (Frankfurt am Main: Stimme-Verlag, 1969), 146.

Am I wrong in thinking that the really operative extraneous ground for infant-baptism, even with the Reformers, and ever and again quite plainly since, has been this: one did not want then in any case or at any price to deny the existence of the evangelical Church in the Constantinian *corpus christianum*—and today one does not want to renounce the present form of the national church (*Volkskirche*)? If she were to break with infant-baptism, the Church would not easily any longer be a people's church in the sense of a state Church or a church of the masses. (52–53)

Barth has no truck with this concern. He wonders where it is written that the church cannot be a small minority in a nation, and whether they might not be of more use as such. Thus he poses the pointed question: “What is really wanted for the Church to remain a National Church in the present day sense of the term: a Church *of* the people, instead of a Church *for* the people?” (53). The notion that the church is *of* the people refers to the church as it was in Barth's context, undergirded by the widespread practice of infant baptism. At the heart of Barth's question is the suspicion that this sort of church is an attempt to insulate people from the claims that Jesus Christ makes upon their lives. Baptism serves in this context as an inoculation—a small dose of Christianity to ease one's conscience should one ever be confronted with the full extent of the gospel's claim upon one's life.

Barth's alternative is a church *for* the people, that is, a church that is ready and willing, “appointed and furnished for the glorifying of God in the upbuilding of the Church of Jesus Christ, for witnessing to the coming reign of God” (63). The doctrine of baptism needs reassessment as the church examines what it means, and how it must change, to be such a church. What sort of baptismal doctrine and practice would establish the church on sure footing for this task? The answer is clear to Barth: “What is wanted is very simple: instead of the present infant-baptism, a baptism which on the part of the baptized is a responsible act. . . . [T]he candidate, instead of being a passive object of baptism, must become once more the free partner of Jesus Christ, that is, freely deciding, freely confessing, declaring on his part his willingness and readiness” (54). That is, baptism must become the baptizand's “pledge of allegiance regarding the grateful service demanded of him” (33). For Barth, it is only as a fellowship of mature and committed servants of Christ that the church can rightly fulfill its mission as a church not *of* the people but *for* the people.

Taken as a whole, Barth's criticism of infant baptism in his 1943 lecture constitutes a criticism operating internal to the Reformed tradition: Barth

broadly maintains Calvin's understanding of sacramentality while drawing conclusions from that understanding to fund a criticism of infant baptism. Thus Barth carries forward Schleiermacher's willingness to expose the tension inherent in Calvin's doctrine of baptism. As Dieter Schellong puts it, Barth's 1943 lecture "was not a disaster for Calvin's basic ideas, but a disaster for his defense of infant baptism" since "Barth has drawn the consequences."⁹⁰ It is not surprising that—as I will document in the following section—many Reformed theologians felt compelled to respond to Barth in defense of, and in order to reassert, the traditional Reformed understanding of infant baptism.

This essay elicited considerable response, often at monograph length, from German, French, Dutch, and English-language theologians.⁹¹ Indeed, the doctrine of baptism that Barth advanced in this essay received considerably more sustained attention than did his more robust treatment in *Church Dogmatics* IV/4.⁹² I will address some of these responses in the next section. Barth's son Markus is the most important figure in terms of positively advancing

90. Dieter Schellong, "Der Ort der Tauflehre in der Theologie Karl Barths," in *Warum Christen ihre Kinder nicht mehr taufen lassen*, ed. Dieter Schellong (Frankfurt am Main: Stimme-Verlag, 1969), 115. Similar judgments abound. Edmund Schlink concedes that Barth's criticism of infant baptism in 1943 makes good sense, provided that one isolates Calvin's doctrine of baptism from his ecclesiology, which Schlink understands as broadly covenantal: see Edmund Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 148. Lutheran theologian Hermann Sasse considers it an open question "whether Barth has not been more Reformed on this subject than the Reformed, whether he has not seen more clearly than any Reformed theologian before him certain inconsistencies of Zwingli and Calvin." Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1985), 36. Finally, Craig Carter treats Barth's doctrine of baptism as part of Barth's "'completion' of the Reformation in the sense of completing the reform of ecclesiology." Craig A. Carter, "Karl Barth's Revision of Protestant Ecclesiology," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 22, no. 1 (1995): 36; see also 41–42.

91. "A high percentage of the discussions about infant baptism in Lutheran and Reformed churches have been caused by Barth's attacks on the practice." Piet Schoonenberg, "Theologische Fragen zur Kindertaufe," in *Christsein ohne Entscheidung, oder Soll die Kirche Kinder taufen?*, ed. Walter Kasper (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1970), 108. Alten corroborates this point about Barth's importance for the mid-twentieth century interest in the question of infant baptism: see Dieter Alten, "Baptism in Recent German Theology," *Restoration Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1963): 124. Berkouwer correctly notes that while Barth's work on baptism spawned many publications, it exerted little concrete influence on church practice: see G. C. Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, trans. Hugo Bekker, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 163.

92. This despite protests from some of Barth's students, such as that from Martin Rumscheidt in the introduction to the volume of Barth's short essays that he edited for publication. Speaking of engagement with Barth's thought on baptism, he interjects parenthetically: "it might be pointed out here that it is utterly insufficient to rely on his 1943 paper, and that it is essential to read *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV, Part Four, on the subject." Karl Barth, *Fragments Grave and Gay*, trans. Eric Mosbacher (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 13–14.

Barth's baptismal theology. As Eberhard Busch tells it, Markus was initially unconvinced by his father's criticisms of infant baptism. However, he came around by the spring of 1950, stopped having his children baptized, and was at work on his book, *Die Taufe—Ein Sakrament?*⁹³ It was in this volume that Markus took a significant step beyond his father's previous rethinking of baptism and criticism of infant baptism, striking to the heart of the matter by rejecting baptism's sacramental status altogether. Indeed, Arthur Cochrane notes that Markus seems to have grasped before his father the ecclesiological implications of the latter's christology, that is, non- and even anti-sacramentalism.⁹⁴

A significant aspect of how Markus worked out his rejection of baptism as a sacrament was through a discussion of whether baptism in the New Testament is properly understood as a mystery. Despite the close parallels that many church fathers drew between baptism and ancient mystery cult rituals, Markus argues against the notion that baptism's meaning ought to be determined on the basis of these parallels. In these cults, the ritual symbol "does not only recall to mind, make evident, sharpen consciousness, or induce experience. . . . It is a real image and creates reality," such that if baptism's meaning is determined by appeal to this concept, it becomes an effective depiction of Christ's death.⁹⁵ Such a conception is easily recognized as the bedrock that lies behind my previous discussion of the sacramental argument for infant baptism. But, Markus asks, is this a properly Christian notion? His answer is a resounding *Nein!* He fails to find such a conception promulgated by Christ or Paul and, given the pagan parallels, concludes that this notion of baptism as a mystery "is not a specifically Christian intellectual production or the result of a specifically Christian worship experience."⁹⁶ In other words, to understand baptism as a sacrament or mystery is, according to Markus, to understand Christian ritual as simply one more instance in an ancient religious class. While this is certainly how Christianity appeared on the religious and philosophical buffet of the ancient world, and while the church fathers often engaged in apologetics aimed at demonstrating Christianity's superiority to these other options on the latter's own terms, the fathers nevertheless remained committed to the belief that Christianity

93. Barth, *Die Taufe—Ein Sakrament?* See also the discussion in Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 369.

94. Arthur C. Cochrane, "Markus Barth—an Un-Barthian Barthian: The Place of the Doctrine of Baptism in the Church Dogmatics," in *Intergerini Parietis Septum: Essays Presented to Markus Barth on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1981), 39.

95. Barth, *Die Taufe—Ein Sakrament?*, 192–93.

96. *Ibid.*, 198.

is concerned with a unique and uniquely true revelation of and relation to God. Markus draws the pregnant conclusion that to understand baptism as a mystery is to establish a Christian cultus that “is neither in its value nor nature fundamentally different from other religions.”⁹⁷

Karl gives his son credit for advancing his thinking on the doctrine of baptism in the preface to *CD IV/4*. Expressing surprise that Markus’s work had not received more attention, perhaps with the insinuation that it was ignored because of its uncomfortable conclusions, Karl notes that “I have had to abandon the ‘sacramental’ understanding of baptism, which I still maintained fundamentally in 1943” (*CD IV/4*, x; *KD IV/4*, x–xi). Indeed, aside from a significantly reworked positive discussion of baptism, Barth correctly identifies this decisive point of departure from his earlier doctrine of baptism. Whereas his earlier work on baptism had retained broad continuity with the Reformed tradition on the issue, apart from the radical criticism of infant baptism, Barth now breaks decisively with all sacramental accounts of baptism. This break is enshrined in his architectural decision to treat Spirit and water baptism independently and sequentially: he understands Spirit baptism as the divine work of awakening one to faith, and water baptism as the faithful human response to that work (see *CD IV/4*, 41; *KD IV/4*, 45). Certainly this shift in Barth’s thinking played a significant role in his decision to revise and publish the lectures on baptism he had delivered in his dogmatics seminar during the academic year of 1959–1960 (see *CD IV/4*, ix; *KD IV/4*, ix).⁹⁸ Thus it was that the old lion of Basel roared one last time.

RECEPTION OF BARTH’S DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

Now that I have located Barth’s critical reformulation of the doctrine of baptism and his rejection of infant baptism within both the broader stream of history and his own immediate context, the reception of Barth’s doctrine comes to the fore. A consideration of this reception is imperative in order to situate the analytic and synthetic claims that I will make with reference to Barth’s doctrine. This section discusses how those more antagonistic and those more supportive

97. *Ibid.*, 218. Otto Weber corroborates much of Markus’s analysis by pointing out that extrabiblical use of “mystery” language came with a “combination of myth and cult that is completely lacking in the New Testament” use of the term. Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell L. Guder, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981–83), 2:587.

98. For some interesting reflection on whether and how his views of baptism shifted during the nearly two decades between the 1943 lecture and the later lectures that would be revised and published as *CD IV/4*, see Karl Barth, *Gespräche, 1959–62*, ed. Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1995), 339–45.

received Barth's doctrine. I will then explicate the singular contribution of Eberhard Jüngel before turning to the question of how the present work fits into this picture. However, it is interesting to begin by highlighting an instance of Barth's uncanny powers of theological prognostication. He notes in the closing paragraphs of his preface to *CD IV/4* that perhaps it will be among Roman Catholics that his work on this matter will be positively engaged and put into action (see *CD IV/4*, xii; *KD IV/4*, xii–xiii). While there is a significant sense in which this has been true, it has not been unambiguously so.

Louis Villette discusses Barth in the second volume of his work *Foi et Sacrement*, where he draws primarily upon Barth's 1943 lecture and the early volumes of *Church Dogmatics*. Villette characterizes Barth as a neo-Calvinist, and this determines the theme of his interpretation.⁹⁹ He reads Barth as slightly more radical than Calvin although fundamentally related to him, but decisively turning his back on what Villette considers the more acceptable Lutheran sacramental doctrine. Further, Villette thinks Barth drastically overemphasizes God's transcendence because of a too-developed fear of cooperation between God and humanity. Indeed, this worry about synergism is what makes Villette think of Barth as a Calvinist.¹⁰⁰ Given his characterization of Barth as a radical Calvinist, Villette does not feel compelled to engage deeply with his doctrine of baptism. One senses that Barth was discussed only because of his high profile as an agitator on these questions.

Perhaps the most extensive treatment of Barth's 1943 lecture is Hans Hubert's *Der Streit um die Kindertaufe*. He examines Barth's lecture, an early response offered by Heinrich Schlier,¹⁰¹ the pertinent exegetical material, and the Reformation background to the debate while also providing a pedantic discussion of the mid-twentieth-century literature. As a whole, the volume reads like a sociological exercise, where Hubert—as a Roman Catholic—asks

99. Villette, *Foi et Sacrement*, 2:284.

100. *Ibid.*, 2:301–2.

101. Heinrich Schlier responded to Barth's 1943 lecture with skepticism, and reasserted a Lutheran position: see Heinrich Schlier, "Zur kirchlichen Lehre von der Taufe," in *Zeit der Kirche: Exegetische Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Freiburg: Herder, 1956). But as Hubert points out with appeal to Käsemann, Schlier's exegetical techniques were even then horribly out of date and do not touch Barth's argument. There is no need for further examination here: see Hans Hubert, *Der Streit um die Kindertaufe: Eine Darstellung der von Karl Barth 1943 ausgelösten Diskussion um die Kindertaufe und ihrer Bedeutung für die heutige Tauffrage*, Europäische Hochschulschriften (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1972), 23–33. Interestingly, the relative merits of Barth's and Schlier's positions were weighed in one of Bultmann's New Testament seminars in 1950: see Bernd Jaspert, *Sachgemässe Exegese: Die Protokolle aus Rudolf Bultmanns Neutestamentlichen Seminaren, 1921–1951*, Marburger Theologische Studien (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1996), 151–52.

what all these Protestants are up to on the question of infant baptism. His sixth concluding thesis sums up his own commitments: “Infant baptism is a basic component of the tradition and is thus non-negotiable.”¹⁰² Thus despite his extensive treatment, Hubert fails to advance the conversation.

A more hopeful line of engagement arises in Walter Kasper’s edited volume, which bears the provocative title, *Christsein ohne Entscheidung, oder Soll die Kirche Kinder taufen?* Kasper notes in his forward that the culture has changed and undermined the assumptions of Christendom, and that this has implications for the question of infant baptism. His goal is to help Roman Catholics take this seriously: “While the problem of infant baptism has been very intensely discussed for some time in Protestant theology and churches, in Catholicism this discussion is still in its infancy. This volume will stimulate such a conversation.”¹⁰³ Although Barth is mentioned in some of the volume’s essays, and he is credited for encouraging discussion of the topic, his criticisms are dealt with rather perfunctorily. For instance, Alfons Kirchgässner raises Barth’s criticisms about the relation of faith and the sacraments only to appeal to Thomas and various Roman Catholic conciliar decisions to pronounce the issue moot.¹⁰⁴ The best example of the sort of engagement that Kasper hoped to stimulate comes from French Roman Catholic theologian Aldo Moda. While Moda sets the question of infant baptism to one side, he takes very seriously Barth’s broader doctrine of baptism and spends the vast majority of his article simply explicating Barth. When the time comes for critical interaction, Moda lays his finger on the nub of the issue between Barth and Roman Catholicism,

102. Hubert, *Der Streit um die Kindertaufe*, 199.

103. Walter Kasper, “Vorwort,” in *Christsein ohne Entscheidung, oder Soll die Kirche Kinder taufen?*, ed. Walter Kasper (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, 1970), 7. Louis Ligier provides a French perspective on the Roman Catholic discussion of infant baptism in the mid-twentieth century, and he writes with motivations similar to Kasper. Ligier also provides a helpful bibliography of mid-twentieth-century French and German sources on infant baptism: see Louis Ligier, “Débat sur le Baptême des Petits Enfants: Motivations Doctrinales et Expériences Actuelles,” *Gregorianum* 57 (1976): 614–16n3.

104. Alfons Kirchgässner, “Die gegenwärtige Taufpraxis und ihre theologische Begründung,” in *Christsein ohne Entscheidung, oder Soll die Kirche Kinder taufen?*, ed. Walter Kasper (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, 1970), 16. Richard Schlüter’s engagement with Barth on the doctrine of baptism is far superior. Schlüter’s interest lies in identifying ways that Barth’s doctrine of baptism and the Roman Catholic position are in essential if not terminological or conceptual agreement; or, seen from the other side, whether or not he truly contradicts traditional teaching: see Richard Schlüter, *Karl Barths Tauflehre: Ein interk confessionelles Gespräch* (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifacius-Druckerei, 1973), 274ff. The payoff that Schlüter finds in Barth’s position is that it maintains many traditional concerns while also recognizing a cultural shift away from concern with external physical signs and toward personal, existential signs (see 286).

namely, Barth's doctrine of vicarious and substitutionary atonement and—even further back, logically speaking—Barth's doctrine of election.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps the greatest impact of the discussion about baptism that Barth precipitated is not to be found in any single theologian's appropriation of his position; rather, it is seen in the results produced by the liturgical renewal movement of the mid- and late-twentieth century. While this movement had roots in Roman Catholic theology apart from the impetus added by Barth, Barth's pivotal role in fomenting a return to the historical, exegetical, and dogmatic questions surrounding the doctrine of baptism is not insignificant. Maxwell Johnson notes that the fruit of this reexamination included a new Rite of Baptism for Children, called for by the Second Vatican Council and promulgated in 1969, a new Rite of Confirmation in 1971, and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in 1972. This latter is highly significant because, as Johnson notes, it "restored for adults the primitive Western unity and sequence of baptism, confirmation, and first communion."¹⁰⁶ In other words, the sort of responsible baptism practiced by Cyril of Jerusalem and embodied by the *Apostolic Tradition* as discussed above came once again to the fore in the Roman Catholic Church. The intervening decades have seen nearly every major denomination in the English-speaking world produce and encourage the use of similar rites. All of this has contributed to what Wright characterizes, perhaps a bit too enthusiastically, as "the inescapable emergence among major paedobaptist communions . . . of a consensus which holds faith baptism as the norm with which infant baptism must be coordinated."¹⁰⁷ Although there has not been a groundswell of support for abandoning the practice of infant baptism, Barth's vigorous rejection of it played no mean role in stimulating the churches to reexamine their baptismal practice and take concrete steps toward promoting a return to the sort of responsible baptism envisaged in the first Christian centuries.¹⁰⁸

105. Aldo Moda, "Le Baptême Chrétien: Sacrement ou Action Humaine?," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 54, no. 2 (1974): 245. Moda goes on to connect these concerns with questions about Barth's christology, which he unfortunately interprets in terms of the traditional differences between Reformed and Lutheran christologies. Lumping Barth in with the Reformed, Moda fears that he does not do justice to Christ's humanity (see 246). George Hunsinger has shown that Barth does justice to both the Reformed tendency toward Antiochene christology as well as the Lutheran tendency toward Alexandrian: see George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000). Further, Paul Jones has now documented at length the seriousness with which Barth takes Christ's humanity: see Paul Dafydd Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2008).

106. Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 291.

107. Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism?*, 10.

PARTIES ANTAGONISTIC TO BARTH

There are likely as many reasons for being antagonistic to Barth's doctrine of baptism and criticism of infant baptism as there are parties who disagree with him. In general, however, antagonistic responses to Barth on this point tend to fall into one of three categories. First, Barth's exegesis is disparaged. Second and most egregiously, Barth's work is summarily dismissed for perceived failings. Third, Barth's doctrine serves as the impetus for a reassertion and defense of the traditional Reformed position.

The belief that the exegesis Barth undertook in support of his doctrine of baptism was subpar is especially widespread among anglophone interpreters of Barth. Indeed, many of those discussed in the next subsection who are otherwise supportive of Barth, even if they wish he had gone in a different direction with his doctrine of baptism, make free to question him here. In general, these questions about Barth's exegesis are not substantiated. This cavalier attitude toward Barth's exegesis on this point depends in no small part on a single essay by Erich Dinkler that examines the passages in question and registers a set of conclusions generally critical of Barth.¹⁰⁹ The most serious problem with all this is the way in which Markus Barth's extensive—over 550 pages!—exegetical examination of baptism in the New Testament is virtually ignored. As mentioned above, Barth's preface to *CD IV/4* gives Markus considerable credit for advancing his thinking on the doctrine of baptism. However, because Karl does not explicitly rely on Markus when carrying out his own exegesis, Dinkler feels justified in proceeding without reference to the latter's work.¹¹⁰ One of the great outstanding difficulties for those who would reject Barth's doctrine of baptism is that Markus has yet to be reckoned with.

108. Barth's rejection of infant baptism appears less radical when considered in the context of reflection upon the conditions under which one is fully initiated into the church. Responsible baptism in the earliest Christian centuries culminated in and was perfected by the newly baptized's first participation in the full life of the community as epitomized by eucharistic celebration. This full initiation into the life of the community signified and sealed by eucharistic participation remained restricted to those who were responsible even when infant baptism became the standard practice in later centuries. Johnson points out that this state of affairs continued beyond the Reformation and that the move by some radical Protestant groups to once again practice only responsible baptism must be understood against the background of this greater consistency. Speaking of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Anabaptists: "Although there may be a world of difference in the theological claims made about infant baptism, in practice there is a commonality between these traditions not often noted. That is, in spite of the theological understanding, all were, in practice, fully initiating only 'responsible,' and faith-professing 'adult' individuals whose intellect and will had been shaped by catechetical education. In other words, except for some isolated instances, infant initiation was not restored in the sixteenth century." Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 372–73.

John Mattes is chief among those who simply dismiss Barth's work on baptism—specifically the 1943 lecture—and he feels justified in doing so for two reasons. First, Mattes believes that Barth's method of quoting Calvin and Luther is "ethically questionable."¹¹¹ His complaint is with how Barth quotes from Calvin and Luther in support of his criticism of infant baptism despite the fact that Calvin and Luther both support the practice. The absurdity of this complaint is self-evident: to follow this logic, one may only quote positively from an author when one is in full agreement with that author. Mattes's second complaint is only slightly less absurd. He believes that Barth's doctrine of baptism undermines Christian assurance of faith. Working from a Lutheran theological outlook, Mattes makes much of the way in which baptism has been understood as a bulwark of faith. He sees it as a reliable demonstration of God's saving work upon which one may fall back in times of distress. "To rob a soul of that assurance is to deprive it of God's most precious gift."¹¹² Furthermore, Mattes worries about a creeping synergism because Barth emphasizes that the baptized are to actively participate in the mission of the church and thereby confirm the efficacy of their baptism.

The doctrine of election is the heart of the issue, however. Mattes notes that Barth relates baptism to election at the close of his discussion: "One can address a person from many different points of view; but if one addresses him concerning God's eternal election and concerning its consequence that Jesus Christ died and rose again for him . . . then one presupposes that the

109. Dinkler, "Die Taufaussagen des Neuen Testaments." Dinkler's essay is the only source that Webster cites in his discussion of exegetical objections to Barth: see John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 168n86. Johnson also registers skepticism concerning Barth's exegesis in a passing comment and, although he does not cite Dinkler, it is clear that he has read Webster on the question. Thus Dinkler likely lies in the background here as well: see William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 170. Yocum, whose work was done under Webster's supervision, makes similar claims: see John Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth*, *Barth Studies* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 162–64. That such a central issue could be so easily bypassed by appeal to a single essay, while virtually ignoring the dozens of fine-print pages that Barth devotes to exegesis in *CD IV/4*, is highly questionable as a research methodology. It is likely that many of these authors were predisposed to distrust Barth's exegesis, and Dinkler happened to provide them with a convenient authority on which to depend. Honorable mention concerning these matters must be given to David Demson, who takes Barth's exegesis as "a challenge to those who regard the core practices of the church as sacraments." David E. Demson, "Church Practices: Sacraments or Invocations? Hütter's Proposal in Light of Barth's," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 18, no. 1 (2002): 87.

110. Dinkler, "Die Taufaussagen des Neuen Testaments," 60n1.

111. John C. Mattes, "A Reply to Karl Barth on Baptism," *Lutheran Church Quarterly* 20 (1947): 182.

112. *Ibid.*, 174.

promise holds good for him and continues sure.”¹¹³ It seems that the mention of election conjures for Mattes nothing other than the scholastic Reformed doctrine of double-predestination, for he immediately professes that this link forged between baptism and election vacates the former of its ability to provide assurance. Appeal to election means, for Mattes, that “in the end [baptism] depends for its personal assurance on a transaction that has previously taken place and that actually depends for its personal realization on the unknown and unknowable will of the *Deus absconditus*.”¹¹⁴ The absurdity of all this is that Mattes appears entirely unaware of Barth’s *CD* II/2, published in 1942, where the question of assurance is one of the primary factors in his radical reformulation of the traditional Reformed doctrine of election. Later chapters will discuss Barth’s doctrine of election at length. For now, it suffices to say that Mattes’s concern here entirely misjudges Barth’s theology.

By far the most common approach to dismissing Barth’s work on baptism is to charge him with inconsistency or a failure of nerve. Edmund Schlink provides an example of this approach. While granting that Barth’s criticisms of infant baptism in the 1943 lecture and *Church Dogmatics* IV/4 carry some weight within Reformed theology, he notes that Barth did not carry through his rejection of infant baptism to the end. That is, while Barth “emphatically warns against infant Baptism, he rejects the rebaptism of those who were baptized as infants.”¹¹⁵ Schlink is correct about Barth’s hesitancy. Barth declares in his 1943 lecture that “no abuse of baptism can affect in any way its actual efficacy,” and he goes on to discuss Augustine’s position on heretical baptism approvingly.¹¹⁶ Later, Barth identifies the “problems and difficulties” associated with baptism, such as questions of emergency baptism, but focuses—albeit briefly—on the question of rebaptism. Without providing an explanation, Barth is quite clear that although infant baptism “may have been administered in a way which is highly doubtful and questionable, because irregular . . . one cannot say that it is invalid” and, therefore, rebaptism is out of the question (*CD* IV/4, 189; *KD* IV/4, 208). This state of affairs allows Schlink to shift his discussion away from the doctrine of baptism proper and to ecclesiology more broadly. Once there, his argument becomes an instance of the sort of Reformed reassertion that I will discuss shortly. Dieter Alten sums up the logic: it appears that Barth “nevertheless practically approves what he theoretically rejects . . . thereby weakening decisively the force of his revolutionary challenge.”¹¹⁷

113. Barth, *Baptism*, 64.

114. Mattes, “Reply to Karl Barth,” 182.

115. Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, 148.

116. Barth, *Baptism*, 56.

What might one reply from Barth's side in response to this charge? As far as his 1943 lecture is concerned, and this is the text before Alten, I noted above that Barth appeals to Augustine's solution concerning heretical baptism. This solution, widely accepted and discussed above in connection to Schleiermacher, stipulates that a baptism may be valid so long as it is formally or ritually correct, later becoming effective under the proper conditions. As Barth's doctrine of baptism remains sacramental in 1943, this solution holds. Because baptism "is a free word and deed of Jesus Christ Himself,"¹¹⁸ it remains in force regardless of administrative deficiencies. The issue is more difficult with reference to *CD IV/4*, where Barth's doctrine is no longer sacramental. Alten suggests that Barth hesitated because of "the pressure of tradition and the fear of being a theological outcast,"¹¹⁹ but Barth's comments in his preface to this later work defy such an explanation: "I foresee that this book . . . will leave me in the theological and ecclesiastical isolation which has been my lot for almost fifty years. . . . So be it!" (*CD IV/4*, xii; *KD IV/4*, xii)

Schlink is closer to the mark when he suggests that Barth held back on this point because of ecumenical awareness.¹²⁰ Barth's good-faith engagement with Roman Catholic theology and theologians throughout his life, as well as

117. Alten, "Baptism in Recent German Theology," 124. John Colwell and Hermann Sasse also give voice to this notion of inconsistency: see John Colwell, "Alternative Approaches to Believer's Baptism (from the Anabaptists to Barth)," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 7 (1989): 20; Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, 43. Sung-Yong Jun is more diverse in his reasons for dismissing Barth's arguments concerning infant baptism: see Sung-Yong Jun, *Karl Barth's Pneumatological Doctrine of Baptism* (Doctoral Dissertation: Aberdeen, 1995). His dissertation is a rather comprehensive work on Barth's development on the doctrines of baptism and pneumatology, although he does not seem to have benefited from Bruce McCormack's work on Barth's genetic development. Jun offers three reasons for why Barth's criticism of infant baptism is "incomplete" (283). First, he thinks it likely that infant baptism was practiced in the New Testament community, despite a lack of exegetical proof (see 284). My account of baptism's historical development, offered earlier in this chapter, tells against such an assumption. Further, I will address a number of the scriptural passages that Jun would likely call to his defense in excurses attached to chapters two and three. The fact of the matter is that we have no clear historical or exegetical indication that such was the case. Second, Jun asserts that Barth conceives of the distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament too sharply (see 285). I address the dogmatic questions surrounding Barth's account of this issue in chapter three, and Jun does not support his assertion with argument or evidence. Third and finally, Jun joins his voice to those who find a damning inconsistency in Barth's maintenance of infant baptism's validity despite its irregular status (see 286). Unfortunately, Jun's dismissal of Barth's criticism of infant baptism on the basis of unsubstantiated assertions and this claim regarding inconsistency is par for the course.

118. Barth, *Baptism*, 15.

119. Alten, "Baptism in Recent German Theology," 125.

120. Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, 157.

the close and interested eye he kept on the Second Vatican Council in the years when he was formulating his mature doctrine of baptism, provide a *prima facie* plausibility for this claim. One might also assume that Barth had no wish to imperiously declare that the vast majority of Christians in the world were not Christians, in a technical sense, because their baptisms had been invalid. Further, Barth may have intended this as a practical parallel to the exegetical reality that infant baptism is nowhere expressly forbidden in scripture. Finally, and more materially pertinent, one must not forget that Barth's mature doctrine of baptism is nonsacramental. He lays great emphasis on the point that baptism is a human action, and not "a divine work and word" (CD IV/4, 102; KD IV/4, 112). It is practiced not because it is essential for one's salvation, but *necessitate praecepti* (CD IV/4, 68; KD IV/4, 75). Key is that one's baptism serves as the decisive moment in the beginning of one's life of Christian responsibility. While baptism most clearly serves as such when administered at a responsible age, one's baptism can certainly also be appropriated as such *post factum*. In this case, one's baptism would—in Barth's language—be irregular, but not invalid. Given all this, it may be that Barth simply allowed himself to be practical on this point, aiming at an incremental eclipse of infant baptism rather than a bloody revolution.

Aside from the sort of dismissive approach to Barth's doctrine of baptism discussed thus far, those antagonistic to him—especially from the Protestant side—have also mounted a reassertion and defense of the traditional Reformed doctrine of infant baptism, that is, of the covenantal argument. This should be no surprise given that Barth's positive account of baptism in this 1943 essay, as well as his sharp criticism of infant baptism, constituted a critically but no less radically Calvinist position. Donald Baillie and Pierre-Charles Marcel offer the best examples of this tendency. Baillie begins his discussion by taking Barth's criticisms very seriously, noting that Barth calls for "a revolutionary change in our whole church life . . . and so we must face the challenge."¹²¹ However, he quickly reverts to the standard patterns of Reformed thinking on the matter. Taking for granted that the most basic and uncontroverted aspect of baptism is its service as a doorway into the church, Baillie makes fundamental the question of whether children born to Christian parents ought to be considered part of the church. Given his premises, rejection of infant baptism is tantamount to judging that such children are not part of the church. With nary an attempt to ground infant baptism in scripture, Baillie moves on to establish an analogy

121. Donald M. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments and Other Papers*, ed. John Baillie (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), 75.

between infant baptism and a mother lovingly carrying for her child. Just as a baby needs its mother's love, "it is also true that a baby must have the grace of God in order that it may grow as a truly Christian child."¹²² Infant baptism is said to insert the child into a new environment—the church. Furthermore, Baillie considers this environment to be more than merely social; rather, it is in some imprecise way a "supernatural environment" that predisposes the child toward a well-adjusted life, and acts as "a channel of God's grace."¹²³ Precisely what the relation is between producing a well-adjusted child and providing such a channel remains unexplained, as does the comment about a "supernatural environment." In sum, the familial character of the church, which rests upon the Reformed understanding of the covenant, undergirds Baillie's response to Barth.¹²⁴

If Baillie counters Barth with reflections based on the traditional Reformed understanding of the covenant without elucidating or substantiating that foundation, Marcel goes straight for the bedrock. He chastises Barth for citing only one Old Testament passage in his 1943 lecture, exclaiming that as far as Barth is concerned on the question of baptism, "the Old Testament counts for nothing, it does not even exist!"¹²⁵ The implication is that had Barth paid greater attention to the Old Testament, and to the covenantal perspective that the Reformed have gleaned therefrom, he would never have criticized

122. *Ibid.*, 87.

123. *Ibid.*, 86.

124. The nearest Baillie comes to explaining these things is the following: "It is through the faith and love of the Church and the parents, directed upon the child through physical channels, and using the effective symbolism of baptism, that the grace of God reaches the scarcely conscious child. And the half-unconscious trustfulness engendered in the child through this supernatural environment—is it not the beginning of the child's faith?" *Ibid.*, 87. Henry Mottu argues in a similar fashion, and John Webster follows him: see Henry Mottu, "Les Sacrements selon Karl Barth et Eberhard Jüngel," *Foi et Vie* 88 (1989): 50f.; Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 169–70. Kühn argues that even adult baptizands are not entirely alone with their faith, but embedded in a community. This leads him to appeal to the role of parents in a child's life as a warrant for their inclusion in the Christian community. Ulrich Kühn, "Die Taufe—Sakrament des Glaubens," *Kerygma und Dogma* 16, no. 4 (1970): 297–98. See also Ralph Kunz, "Reformierte Taufpraxis—Theologisch Verantwortet," in *Eine Taufe—Viele Meinungen*, ed. Thomas Hafner and Jürg Luchsinger (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2008), 121. Finally, Colin Gunton thinks through baptism on lines very similar to Baillie's, although Barth factors only tangentially in his treatment and Baillie does not appear at all: see Colin E. Gunton, "Baptism: Baptism and the Christian Community," in *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Essays toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003).

125. Pierre-Charles Marcel, *The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism: Sacrament of the Covenant of Grace*, trans. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, Library of Theological Translations (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2002), 16.

infant baptism. Instead, Marcel speaks of the “absolute cleavage” or “drastic opposition” between Old and New Testaments in Barth’s treatment, as evidenced by his rejection of the strong connection that the Reformed have found between circumcision and baptism. Later he calls this “probably the weakest point in [Barth’s] doctrine of Baptism.”¹²⁶ By way of contrast, Marcel labors over demonstrating that circumcision was a spiritual as well as carnal sign, and in charting the relatively minor distinctions that must be made between the sacraments of the Old Testament and those of the New. In terms of marshaling his own account of baptism and the inclusion of infants therein, Marcel—like Baillie—appeals to the importance of the family in the covenant: “The children of believers are considered by God as being involved in the faith of their parents; the family, as such, forms a concrete whole” and “God includes them in the covenant.” Because they are thus included in the covenant, they should be granted access to “baptism which is the sign and seal of it.”¹²⁷

In all fairness, Baillie and Marcel wrote in the nearly two decades between Barth’s 1943 lecture and his much fuller treatment of baptism in *Church Dogmatics* IV/4. If they had the final range of Barth’s materials before them, they would not have found him so easily dispensable.¹²⁸ However, these works of Reformed reassertion and defense in response to Barth’s 1943 lecture seem to have established the widespread but erroneous impression that Barth’s account of baptism and his criticisms of infant baptism can be surmounted by such simplistic tactics.

PARTIES SUPPORTIVE OF BARTH

There are certainly many who are favorably disposed to Barth’s theology and to his doctrine of baptism. For instance, both André Dumas and Robert Short have attempted to bring Barth’s doctrine of baptism, and especially his criticisms of infant baptism, to their respective contexts.¹²⁹ Also deserving of mention here

126. *Ibid.*, 82.

127. *Ibid.*, 192.

128. G. C. Berkouwer deserves special mention here. He engages Barth’s criticism with recourse to many more of the latter’s mature writings than did Baillie and Marcel, albeit still decisively bereft of *Church Dogmatics* IV/4. Unfortunately, he—like his British and French forebears—does not consider the importance of Barth’s doctrine of election as the context of his criticisms of infant baptism. Without dealing with the fundamental questions posed to traditional Reformed theology by Barth’s doctrine of election, Berkouwer’s conclusions concerning Barth’s doctrine of baptism are foregone. His response to Barth is materially consistent with Marcel’s: see Berkouwer, *Sacraments*, 164ff. Those with facility in Dutch may also wish to consult Berkouwer’s earlier work: G. C. Berkouwer, *Karl Barth en de Kinderdoop* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1947).

are two authors who have sought to carry forward Barth's criticisms, albeit in their own way and from their own resources, namely, G. R. Beasley-Murray and Paul Jewett. Beasley-Murray works out of the Baptist tradition, providing an extensive treatment of baptism on an exegetical and historical basis. On the other hand, Jewett works from within the Reformed tradition, arguing that precisely those modes of thought taken as supporting the covenantal argument for infant baptism actually undermine it. Although neither author aligns himself with Barth's theology in general, or seeks to make his case on the basis of that theology, both have learned from Barth and deserve to be more widely read.¹³⁰

Another group of authors generally supportive of Barth have concerned themselves with the question of whether his doctrine of baptism, and especially his rejection of infant baptism, is consistent with the remainder of his theology. Dieter Schellong is outstanding here, providing an extensive discussion of how Barth's doctrines of revelation and the threefold Word of God, reconciliation, and ecclesiology relate to his doctrine of baptism.¹³¹ More recently, Paul Nimmo treats baptism as part of his careful study of the relation between divine and human activity in Barth's ethics. Nimmo argues that Barth's doctrine of baptism constitutes a "case study" for such matters, and that the picture Barth paints there is entirely consistent with his broader work on this question, and especially with the doctrine of *concursum* advanced in *Church Dogmatics* III/3. Numerous other examples are available.¹³²

More interesting is another group of generally careful and sympathetic readers of Barth who wish that he had retained a more traditional Reformed sacramentology. In other words, they are far more comfortable with Barth's 1943 lecture on baptism than they are with *Church Dogmatics* IV/4, although they lament his criticism of infant baptism in both works. While admitting that Barth's final work on baptism is internally coherent with his theology as a whole, they nonetheless suspect that Barth could have gone in another

129. See André Dumas, "Faut-Il Démythologiser les Sacraments?," *Foi et Vie* 63, no. 3 (1968); Robert L. Short, "Karl Barth's Final Plea," *Religion in Life* 40, no. 4 (1971). Dumas does by far the superior job in contextualizing Barth's thinking on baptism within the broader scope of his theology as a whole. Short relies overmuch on anecdote. Jürgen Moltmann also deserves mention here as one who champions many important aspects of Barth's doctrine of baptism, although his debt to Barth is implicit rather than explicit: see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 226–42.

130. See Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*; Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace: An Appraisal of the Argument That as Infants Were once Circumcised, so They Should now Be Baptized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978). It is unfortunate that Jewett falls into the trap of unreflectively criticizing Barth for not denying infant baptism's validity (see 211).

131. Schellong, "Der Ort der Tauflehre in der Theologie Karl Barths."

direction. Examples of this line of thinking could easily be compounded, but they tend only to gesture vaguely toward what this other direction might look like. George Hunsinger exceeds the others, describing *Church Dogmatics* as “a labyrinth that has more than one pathway to get out”¹³³ and providing an extensive discussion of how Barth’s theological resources might be deployed differently. He makes two moves to advance his case. First, just as Barth developed an account of the threefold Word of God, where secondary and dependent forms are related to the definitive and constitutive form of God’s Word, Jesus Christ, he might well also have developed a parallel account of the threefold sacrament. Second, Hunsinger argues that witness and mediation are complementary rather than exclusive concepts, the former demarcating a movement from humanity to God while the latter indicates a movement from God to humanity, such that Jesus Christ is able not only to attest himself through secondary forms but also to impart himself. The payoff is an account of baptism as visible Word, such that “the Holy Spirit mediates communion between Christ and faith by means of water baptism.”¹³⁴

This notion of communion is important for Hunsinger, and what he calls “*koinonia*-relations” play an important conceptual role in his proposal. *Koinonia*-relations are relations of “mutual indwelling” between two terms.¹³⁵ Examples from Hunsinger’s proposal include the relation between Jesus Christ the one sacrament and the individual sacraments, or between witness and mediation. It is also through the notion of *koinonia*-relations that Hunsinger parses infant baptism. Granting that baptism at a responsible age is the standard position, Hunsinger suggests that infant baptism fits within his account as “a

132. Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth’s Ethical Vision* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 126–30. Van der Kooi, thinking about a matrix of issues in Barth’s theology similar to that tackled by Nimmo, puts it well: “The doctrine of baptism is no alien element, but a ripe harvest of Barth’s theology.” Cornelis van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror: John Calvin and Karl Barth on Knowing God*, ed. Robert J. Bast, trans. Donald Mader, vol. 120, *Studies in the History of Christian Traditions* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 391. For further examples in this vein, see also Cochrane, “Markus Barth—an Un-Barthian Barthian”; Walter Kreck, “Karl Barths Tauflehre,” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 94, no. 6 (1969). Of course, John Yocum registers the contrary claim that “Barth’s late sacramental (or anti-sacramental) doctrine is . . . a subversion of important elements” in Barth’s theology. Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth*, xi.

133. George Hunsinger, “Baptism and the Soteriology of Forgiveness,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2, no. 3 (2000): 266. Reinhard Böttcher’s work goes a long way toward demonstrating this insight, at least at the conceptual level: see Reinhard Böttcher, *Erwählung und Verpflichtung: Eine Untersuchung zu Karl Barths Tauflehre im Kontext der Kirchlichen Dogmatik*, Inaugural-Dissertation (Evangelisch-Theologischen Fakultät der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1983).

134. Hunsinger, “Baptism and the Soteriology of Forgiveness,” 261.

135. *Ibid.*, 248.

prolep[ti]c form of adult baptism,” thus establishing his position as a gloss on the traditional Reformed notion that the faith required by baptism might well arise *post hoc* in the case of infant baptizands. He goes farther than this, however, through explicating the relation between the baptizand’s faith and the community’s as a *koinonia*-relation: “The faith of the community is present in the infant (vicariously), and the faith of the infant is present in the community (proleptically).”¹³⁶

Finally, beyond even the claim that Barth might have done otherwise is T. F. Torrance’s position. Torrance made no secret of his dissatisfaction with Barth’s doctrine of baptism in *Church Dogmatics* IV/4. Indeed, Torrance tells the story of a meeting he had with both Karl and Markus Barth in Edinburgh during 1966. Markus Barth knew of Torrance’s disagreement with his work on baptism and wanted to talk about it. This *Auseinandersetzung* occupied nearly the whole day. Torrance describes the position he advanced as one that understands baptism “as the Sacrament of the vicarious obedience of Christ the Servant-Son.” As Torrance tells it, Karl listened silently during the course of the discussion until “at the end of the day he turned to his son and said simply, ‘*Nicht so schlecht, Markus!*’”¹³⁷ Torrance appeals to this comment as something of an imprimatur for his position. Of course, one should not make too much of this since Barth nonetheless published in the following year his final statement on the doctrine of baptism, which is devoid of the sort of position that Torrance reports advancing during this meeting.

The sort of baptismal position Torrance describes himself articulating in this exchange with Markus and under Karl’s watchful eye in 1966 had its roots in Torrance’s work as convener for the Church of Scotland’s Special Commission on Baptism, which operated from 1953 to 1963. At its heart is the notion of Christ’s vicarious obedience, which the Commission’s 1962 report affirms as follows: “In being baptized into Christ we are united with Him in

136. *Ibid.*, 262. For others who claim that, although he was consistent, Barth might have deployed a different doctrine of baptism, see Fangmeier, “Die Praxis der Taufe nach Karl Barth,” 170–71; H. Hartwell, “Karl Barth on Baptism,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (1969): 28–29; Johnson, *The Mystery of God*, 169–70; Migliore, “Reforming the Theology and Practice of Baptism,” 505–11; Paul D. Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord’s Supper: A Systematic Investigation*, ed. Paul D. Molnar, *Issues in Systematic Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 303–6 (*et passim*); Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entry into Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 81–84; Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 166–73. This “Yes . . . but!” position is far and away the most popular option among anglophone interpreters of Barth.

137. Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990), 135.

His faithfulness and obedience to the Father,”¹³⁸ where language of Christ’s “faithfulness and obedience” gestures toward the same reality as does talking about Christ’s “vicarious obedience.” The root notion here, which goes back at least to Calvin, is that Jesus obeyed God in our place (see *Inst.*, 2.16.5). Torrance’s position on baptism became more accessible with the article he published on the topic in 1970, and we find there a judgment concerning Barth’s doctrine. For Torrance, baptism is not primarily what happens to the Christian individual, but what happened to Jesus Christ in the Jordan. This is the one baptism common to Christ and his church, language that Torrance uses for his title and that appears in the Church of Scotland reports.

Further, one must wonder whether Torrance’s emphasis on the rootedness of Christian baptism in Christ’s baptism, vicariously conceived, owes something to Oscar Cullmann. By positing an objective “general baptism” that pertains to all humanity on the basis of Christ’s saving work, Cullmann tried—in response to Barth’s 1943 treatment—to advocate the extension of baptism to infants through a slightly modified version of the covenantal argument.¹³⁹ This is similar to how Torrance describes Christian baptism as a participation in Christ’s own baptism: the decisive thing has already taken place objectively, whether in Christ’s baptism or in some sort of general baptism, and Christian baptism puts one in touch with that objective reality. For Torrance, baptism as practiced by the church is an event wherein “Christ . . . is savingly at work . . . drawing us within the power of his vicarious life, death and resurrection,” a life for which baptism in the Jordan consecrated Jesus.¹⁴⁰ *Koinonia* or communion is an important concept for Torrance, and our baptism is a mode of participation in Christ’s baptism. This presages Hunsinger’s notion of *koinonia*-relations.

What, then, is Torrance’s criticism of Barth? Torrance does not elaborate on his criticism, but he certainly registers it. In short, Torrance claims that

138. Church of Scotland, “Report of the Special Commission on Baptism,” in *Reports to the General Assembly with the Legislative Acts* (Edinburgh: Blackwood and T. & A. Constable, 1962), 717. Spinks notes that “much of the drafting [of these reports] was in the hands of the Convener” and confirms that “a ‘Torrance flavour’ to these reports is not too difficult to discern.” Bryan D. Spinks, “‘Freely by His Grace’: Baptismal Doctrine and the Reform of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Church of Scotland, 1953–1994,” in *Rule of Prayer, Rule of Faith: Essays in Honor of Aidan Kavanagh*, ed. Nathan Mitchell and John F. Baldwin (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 220.

139. Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, trans. J. K. S. Reid, *Studies in Biblical Theology* (London: SCM, 1961), 70.

140. Thomas F. Torrance, “The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church,” in *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 83; see also 85. For the titular language, see Church of Scotland, “Report of the Special Commission on Baptism,” 714.

while Barth made great strides in shaking free from the dualism inherent in the Augustinian tradition, “vestiges of this dualism persisted for some time in Barth’s thought, most notably in his understanding of the sacraments.”¹⁴¹ It is hard to lay a finger on precisely what Torrance has in mind here with reference to Barth’s doctrine of baptism. His 1970 essay sheds more light. There Torrance asserts that if one rejects that the sacraments mediate supernatural grace between God and humanity, which both he and Barth are wont to do, then one is left with two options: either return to a dualistic separation between water and Spirit baptism, as he thinks Barth does, or press forward by seeing them as even more closely related, as Torrance wants to do. The problem with Barth’s move is that it retreats into “an operational disjunction between God and the world,” which Torrance sees as a vestige of deism.¹⁴² In other words, Barth’s sharp distinction between divine activity in Spirit baptism and human activity in water baptism denies, in Torrance’s mind, the conviction—born of the incarnation—that God is a living God who acts here and now in our world. Given that Barth famously understands God’s being as a Being-in-Act (see *CD / KD* II/1, §28.1), one can see why Torrance would consider Barth’s reversion to such dualism as “deeply inconsistent” with his broader theology.¹⁴³ As to the veracity of Torrance’s criticism of Barth, it is worth noting that both John Webster and Paul Molnar register judgments on this score. For Webster, Torrance’s emphasis on the vicarious nature of Christ’s baptism prevents him from doing justice to the profoundly ethical way in which Barth conceives of the relation between God and humanity, and Molnar simply states that he does “not see a Gnostic dualism” in Barth’s way of distinguishing water from Spirit baptism.¹⁴⁴

EBERHARD JÜNGEL

Eberhard Jüngel provides a unique contribution to the reception of Barth’s doctrine of baptism. This contribution consists in pointing to the fundamental importance of Barth’s doctrine of election in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 for his doctrine of baptism. Precisely their inattention to this point constitutes the weakness of the reception Barth’s doctrine of baptism receives from the previously discussed authors, especially among those who are otherwise sympathetic to Barth’s theology. Of those theologians discussed above, only

141. Torrance, *Karl Barth*, 138.

142. Torrance, “The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church,” 100.

143. *Ibid.*, 99.

144. Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 170–72; Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 303f. I return to Torrance’s criticism of Barth in a pair of longish footnotes in chapter five.

Roman Catholic Aldo Moda notes that the impulses that control Barth's late doctrine of baptism can be traced back to his doctrine of election, and he has been informed by Jüngel's work.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, attention to the implications of Barth's doctrine of election for his doctrine of baptism aligns with the most recent work on the development of Barth's theology. For instance, Bruce McCormack has argued that Barth's doctrine of election in *CD II/2* represented a new stage in the clarity and self-consistency of Barth's christological theology.¹⁴⁶ While the discontinuity of what follows this decisive part-volume with that which came before can sometimes be overstated, it is nonetheless true that Barth's doctrine of election towers over the *Church Dogmatics* as a whole.

Jüngel estimates that people will not likely penetrate to this realization. Rather than recognize the integral relation between Barth's doctrine of baptism and his theology as a whole, readers fixate on the practical fruit of that doctrine. They then reject these practical consequences while failing to engage with the dogmatic premises that lie in the background.¹⁴⁷ For his part, Jüngel means to make those dogmatic premises explicit. He does so with reference to the ethical context of Barth's doctrine of baptism in *CD IV/4*. Jüngel notes that the vital thing for Barth is the baptizand's responsiveness, which implies responsibility. This has direct ties to Barth's doctrine of election in *CD II/2*. There Barth establishes Jesus Christ as not only the electing God but also the elected human being. This means that "God in His free grace determines Himself for sinful man and sinful man for Himself" (*CD II/2*, 94; *KD II/2*, 101). Such a twofold determination provides the context for the responsiveness that Barth is after in his doctrine of baptism. God has determined to be God in relationship with humanity, and that humanity will exist in relationship with God. Humans live up to their election by being responsive to, and responsible before, God. For

145. See Moda, "Le Baptême Chrétien," 245. This is implicit in Hunsinger: see Hunsinger, "Baptism and the Soteriology of Forgiveness," 266. Nimmo's handling of baptism as a case study for the relation of divine and human activity in Barth is also consistent with Jüngel's insight insofar as Nimmo understands Barth's account of this relation to be fundamentally determined by his doctrine of election: see Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 4–12. Richardson also highlights this point, but he is directly and self-consciously dependent upon and interested in bringing attention to Jüngel's treatment. He also seems to suggest that there is a bit of a conspiracy afoot to keep Jüngel's work on Barth's doctrine of baptism away from anglophone theology: see Kurt Anders Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth: New Directions for North American Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 176–90. Finally, Böttcher discerns a close relationship between Barth's doctrine of election in *CD II/2* and his 1943 essay on baptism, where—as described above—he first deeply criticizes infant baptism: see Böttcher, *Erwählung und Verpflichtung*, 65.

146. See Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 453–63.

147. Jüngel, "Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe," 285.

Barth, Christian baptism is a decisive moment in this responsive relationship. As far as Jüngel is concerned, all of this protects one of Barth's most vital insights, namely, that God is God and humanity is humanity: "Just as God proves that he is himself through acts of divine being, so humans should prove to be human through acts of human being."¹⁴⁸ Baptism is a definitive instance of an act that proves one as a human being in responsible relationship with God.

Thus Jüngel advances his claim: "The doctrine of baptism is . . . not an appendix to the *Church Dogmatics*, but rather . . . a test-case." Consequently, anyone who "wants infant baptism should not seek nourishment for the pulpit from Barth's doctrine of election. . . . It is one or the other—one must decide for oneself."¹⁴⁹ Both those who argue that Barth's doctrine of baptism can be met by recourse to traditional Reformed arguments and those who would revise his doctrine of baptism from within—and especially those who offhandedly claim this as a possibility—stand under Jüngel's judgment.¹⁵⁰

LOOKING FORWARD

This chapter sets the stage for what is to come. As the *corpus christianum* crumbled, Barth recognized that the church's practice of infant baptism presented theological problems. Convinced by neither of the two primary arguments for infant baptism on offer in the theological tradition—the sacramental and covenantal arguments—Barth rejected the practice. In his final statement on the question, Barth's criticism included a further rejection of understanding baptism as a sacrament. He rejected infant and sacramental baptism on the basis of his broader theology, and especially his doctrine of election. However, many readers of Barth have not taken this rejection

148. *Ibid.*, 288.

149. *Ibid.*, 286–87.

150. It is worth noting here two receptions of Barth that do not fit under the above categories, but do pertain to this discussion of Jüngel. First, Gordon Mikoski suggests that Barth's rejection of infant baptism can be attributed to his experiences with Nazi Germany and his aversion to "cultural Christianity." Gordon S. Mikoski, *Baptism and Christian Identity: Teaching in the Triune Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 223. I mentioned previously how the problem of Christendom influenced Barth on these matters. It is flatfooted of Mikoski, however, to marginalize Barth's concerns by suggesting that the only needful response to them is greater attention to catechesis. Second, Bryan Spinks suggests that "Barth's lack of serious interest in and knowledge of liturgy" contributed to a lack of theological imagination when it came to the question of infant baptism. Bryan D. Spinks, "Karl Barth's Teaching on Baptism: Its Development, Antecedents and the 'Liturgical Factor,'" *Ecclesia Orans* 14 (1997): 288. This is certainly an interesting thesis, and one that cannot entirely be gainsaid. However, both these lines of reception fail to properly account for the serious theological commitments involved in Barth's rejection of infant baptism. I mention them here because precisely these commitments are what Jüngel's work brings to attention.

seriously. Along with many non-Barthian Reformed theologians, they ultimately fall back upon the covenantal argument as a bulwark against Barth's seemingly too radical position. The next two chapters aim at contextualizing Barth's rejection of the sacramental and covenantal arguments for infant baptism within his broader theology, and especially with reference to his doctrine of election. These are followed by a chapter that discusses how Barth's doctrine of baptism in *CD IV/4* fits positively with his other theological commitments, especially with reference to his understanding of baptism as the beginning of the Christian life.

It is in these chapters that I accomplish this work's first task, namely, to explicate how Barth's rejection of the sacramental and covenantal accounts of infant baptism offered by the tradition, and his positive teaching on baptism offered in *CD IV/4*, fit within his broader theological commitments. Further, and following Jüngel's lead, I will give special attention to how decisions Barth made in his doctrine of election eventually play out, conceptually speaking, in his doctrine of baptism. The logic informing Barth's doctrine of baptism has important touchstones in his doctrine of election that require attention. This is not surprising since, as was noted above, Barth broke with the Reformed tradition on infant baptism in the late 1930s, precisely the years during which he was grappling with the doctrine of election. Further, he first gave voice to his criticism of infant baptism in 1943, a year after *CD II/2* was published. That his rejection of infant baptism should be bound up with his doctrine of election is strongly suggested by such chronological intersection.

At the same time, Hunsinger is right in his description of the *Church Dogmatics* as "a labyrinth that has more than one pathway to get out."¹⁵¹ Whereas Hunsinger reaches back behind *CD II/2* and Barth's doctrine of election for resources to advance his own account of baptism, this is unnecessary. Barth's doctrine of election could have spawned a very different doctrine of baptism. Chapter five will explore this possibility, advancing the second aspect of my thesis: notwithstanding the consistency of Barth's doctrine of baptism within his broader theological commitments, those commitments—even and especially post-*CD II/2*—possess resources for marshaling a doctrine of baptism in general, and of infant baptism in particular, that would maintain consistency within his theology as a whole. A guiding principle in this chapter will be Calvin's description of baptism as "the sign of the Gospel,"¹⁵² and Barth's commitment to the church's missionary character will play an important role.

151. Hunsinger, "Baptism and the Soteriology of Forgiveness," 266.

A final point about Barth's exegesis requires mention. I suggested above that the way many have dismissed the exegetical basis of Barth's baptismal doctrine is too facile. Again, Markus Barth remains as a challenge to such dismissal that his father's critics have not yet taken up seriously. This work is not the place for a thorough examination of the relation between Markus and Karl's exegesis of particular passages or their relationship in general. Such comparison would no doubt be fruitful and ought to be undertaken, but I will not pursue it here. However, some exegetical discussion is necessary given the important role that it plays in Barth's doctrine. Therefore, in addition to the discussion that will naturally arise in describing Barth's position and advancing my own, chapters two and three—those dealing respectively with Barth's rejection of the sacramental and covenantal arguments for infant baptism—conclude with exegetical excursions dealing with the most pertinent biblical texts.

152. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin Translation Society ed., 3 volumes bound in 2 vols., Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 3:383.