

IT is many a long day since we heard clergymen publicly declare their emphatic belief that the 'baptism' of infants has the authority of God and is taught in the scriptures. It happened a few weeks ago at the annual General Assembly of the Church of Scotland held in Edinburgh. The Assembly lasts for a week or more and authoritative decisions are taken for Church of Scotland members on widely ranging subjects - from doctrine to social services. Highlights of each day's transactions are shown on television in the late evening and although I am not a member of the Church of Scotland I try to see these programmes out of academic interest. One evening the subject under discussion was that of the 're-baptism' of a few of their members by the Baptist Church. Apparently, in a few isolated cases, a member of the Church of Scotland ('baptised' as a baby) will, on becoming more knowledgeable of the teaching of the scriptures on baptism request to be immersed (usually by the Baptist Church). In the past, when this has occurred, the Church of Scotland have informed the member involved that, in the circumstances, it might be best for that person to transfer his membership to the Baptist Church i.e. if not satisfied with Church of Scotland Baptism they were free to go elsewhere and indeed were encouraged to do so. At this year's Assembly some clergymen, alarmed at the loss, however small, of members to another Church, suggested that the Church of Scotland should take a more lenient line in such cases and allow 're-baptised' members to remain. After much discussion, however, the proposal was over-ruled and it was decided that the former policy would continue and that any member who wanted to go to the Baptist Church for baptism need not return but should stay with the Baptist Church. Some of the statements by some of the clergymen who took part in the discussion were interesting and it was avowed that the scriptures clearly taught the baptism practiced by the Church of Scotland i.e. the 'baptism' of babies. When this statement was made there were 'amens' and grunts of general approval from the vast assembly of clergymen. One speaker went as far as to say that the term 're-baptism' was a misnomer in that the immersion in another church could not be a baptism in the bible sense when, in fact, that person had already had proper baptism as a baby in the Church of Scotland i.e. there could not be a re-baptism if the first baptism was the real one, and the true one. It was wrong therefore, according to this speaker, to allow 're-baptised' persons to remain and thus perpetually infer that the Church of Scotland baptism was spiritually and scripturally inadequate. And so the Church of Scotland reiterated their unshakable belief that the baptism of infants has God's authority and thus have entrenched themselves in their present position. However I have reason to believe that some individual clergymen have, to put it mildly, grave reservations about the scriptural validity of the practice and I have heard of clergymen in other churches, which practice the baptism of infants, of altogether resigning their charge. Indeed the Church of Scotland have, in the past, been so ill-at-ease with the subject of baptism that they appointed a Special Com-

mission on Baptism. This Commission deliberated the question from 1953 until 1962 – thereafter publishing a considerable document on the matter but recommending a continuance of the baptism of infants. All in all, this resurgence of interest and confirmation of baby baptism by the Church of Scotland suggests that we ought to look again at the subject and its implications. Surely no religious practice ever carried less scriptural authority. Let us remind ourselves therefore of some of the more obvious objections to it.

The bible certainly does not appear to mention it and although it is performed in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit it is sanctioned by neither. Certainly Jesus said, “Suffer the little children to come unto me” but He didn’t command them to be baptised and indeed His remark had nothing whatsoever to do with baptism. They who would enter the Kingdom must become as little children but not literally. Those who say it replaced circumcision would need scriptural sanction for such a statement and in any case circumcision was for males only. Babies are sinless and as such are already fit for the kingdom of Heaven which is precisely the reverse of the thinking behind baby baptism. The baptism of infants is partly a horrible consequence of the doctrine of ‘original sin’ which, it itself, is not founded in scripture. We read of ‘households’ being baptised in the New Testament but that is a far cry from the assumption that every household has babies in its composition. I reckon that the majority of the houses in the street where I live have no infants in the household and it surely is quite wrong and illogical to assume that all households contain babies and that therefore the ‘households’ mentioned in the New Testament had babies. Indeed the scriptures teach that only the following categories of persons are fit candidates for New Testament baptism:—

- 1 Taught Persons – “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).
- 2 Believing Persons – “He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved. (Mark 16:16).
- 3 Penitent Persons – “And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).
- 4 Confessing Persons – The eunuch before being baptised confessed, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). Indeed all that hindered the eunuch from being baptised was the requirement that he must believe with all his heart (Acts 8:37).

If any attention is to be paid to the New Testament at all, and surely in a consideration of New Testament baptism students will be willing to accept the New Testament scriptures, then the above passages, per se, rule out the possibility of infants being rightfully baptised. These passages place teaching (or preaching), belief, repentance and confession as prerequisites to baptism. Those who baptise babies reverse that order by saying, “let’s baptise them now and they can (perhaps) be taught, believe, repent and confess when they grow up”. It is, of course, by virtue of the very nature of baptism, quite futile to ‘baptise’ a baby; the very necessary preceding ingredients of personal belief and repentance not being present. One might as well baptise a monkey or a spaniel. It is said that Henry Ward Beecher agreed that there was no scriptural authority for infant baptism but he did it because it seemed a nice thing to do. If this is true then Mr. Beecher was at least honest about it but how he ever imagined that it was a nice thing to do escapes me. To mislead someone into believing that he or she has received New Testament baptism when, in fact, they have not must surely be a most serious deception (whether intentional or not). The churches of Christ are often accused by the denominational bodies of emphasising baptism unduly and believing in ‘water’ salvation. If the sprinkling of water on a baby ushers it into the church (as per the teaching of some of the denominations) notwithstanding the complete ignorance of the baby (i.e. it has not heard the gospel and can’t believe it, nor is it in a position to repent from sins had it any to repent from, nor can it confess belief in anything) then that is ‘water’ salvation indeed. Anyone, therefore, who subscribes to that point of view, a view quite unsupported by any scripture but condemned by much, should think twice, or thrice, before accusing anyone of believing in ‘water’ salvation.

After watching the broadcast from the Assembly on T.V. I wrote to the Church of Scotland headquarters and asked for some information regarding precisely where the New Testament taught or authorised the baptism of infants, I received a very kind reply a few days ago enclosing

a small 19-page booklet entitled "The Doctrine of Baptism" which claimed to be "An Interpretation of The Biblical And Reformed Doctrine of Baptism" which, notwithstanding its promising title proved to be extremely disappointing to any one who was seeking guidance on the matter of New Testament Baptism. During the entire booklet, which is the outcome of the work of the Special Commission on Baptism which considered the subject from 1953 to 1962, the scriptures are rarely referred to, Acts 2:39 is mentioned and is quoted, it seems, to infer that when Peter said, "the promise is unto you, and to your children..." he was authorising the baptism of infants. My space has more than gone and a great deal more could be said on the matter, this re-affirmation by the Church of Scotland on the scriptural validity of infant sprinkling shows, however, that we too should re-examine the subject and be in a position, when required, to present to others the truth of the matter.

EDITOR