

NOTES

THE SEALING AT CONFIRMATION

The status of confirmation has been the matter of a long and learned debate among English churchmen since 1946. If it is held to be a sacrament by Anglicans, reunion with Methodists and Presbyterians will be made much more difficult; if it is refused the status of a sacrament and, not being counted as a sacrament of the Gospel, is regarded as having "grown of the corrupt following of the Apostles," as the ambiguous wording of Article XXV (among the XXXIX) seems to maintain, then the High Church wing will be faced with a difficult decision about their faith. The result of the controversy¹ has been to cause a reconsideration of all the ancient patristic and liturgical texts which bear upon the matter, and finally to call forth the long and searching examination by Mr. Lampe,² who, benefitting by his position as editor of the *Lexicon of Patristic Greek*, has been able to draw upon the files prepared for publication on such words as *sphragis*. Even so, the controversy is not ended, since one of the chief exponents of the High Church view of confirmation, L. S. Thornton, a religious of the Community of the Resurrection, has replied to Lampe with some vigour,³ being now alone to sustain the debate since the untimely death from cancer of Gregory Dix, monk of the Anglican Benedictines at Nashdom.

The present controversy, which Mr. Lampe's book shows no sign of having settled, grew out of an earlier and more practical enquiry about the

¹ Cf. Gregory Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism* (Westminster: Dacre, 1946); Sherwin Bailey, "Baptism and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit," *Theology*, January, 1946, pp. 11-14; L. S. Thornton, *Confirmation To-day* (Westminster: Dacre, 1946); E. C. Ratcliff, "The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism in the Early Roman and Byzantine Liturgies," *Theology*, September and October, 1946, pp. 258-65, 290-95; J. E. L. Oulton, "Second Century Teaching on Holy Baptism," *ibid.*, March, 1947, pp. 86-91; A. E. J. Rawlinson, *Christian Initiation* (London: S.P.C.K., 1947); Dix, "The Seal in the Second Century," *Theology*, January, 1948, pp. 7-12; T. W. Manson, "Entry into Membership of the Early Church," *Journal of Theological Studies*, XLVIII (1947), 25-33; *The Theology of Christian Initiation: A Report of a Theological Commission Appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to Advise on the Relations between Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion* (London: S.P.C.K., 1948); Ratcliff, "Justin Martyr and Confirmation," *Theology*, April, 1948, pp. 133-39; Thornton, "The Holy Spirit in Christian Initiation," *Eastern Churches Quarterly*, VII (1948), Supplementary Issue 2, pp. 53-69.

² G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers* (London: Longmans, 1951).

³ L. S. Thornton, "Baptism and Confirmation in Current Controversy," *Quarterly Chronicle of the Community of the Resurrection*, June, 1952.

delaying of baptism where no assurance is at hand that the infant offered for baptism will be educated as a Christian. Here it was felt by some that, if baptism was delayed in such cases until the age of ten or more, then the patristic custom of uniting the rites of baptism and confirmation might be reverted to, while others denied that there was any point in reviving antiquated practices. As often happens, the practical question led to a demand for a more exact idea of the theology of the relation between baptism and confirmation, and this in its turn has led to the present acute divergence between the two wings of Anglicanism. Such crises are periodic in Anglicanism and do not necessarily suggest that a schism is about to occur. A higher synthesis, in Hegelian fashion, may be produced, or there may be just another "agreement to differ," with an act of faith in the comprehensiveness of the Anglican Church.

Tyndale the Reformer jeered at confirmation as practised by the Catholic Church in England: "They think that if the bishop butter the child in the forehead, that it is safe."⁴ The Elizabethan Bishop Jewel claimed that baptism made a perfect Christian: "Whosoever is baptized receiveth thereby the full name of a perfect Christian, and hath the full and perfect covenant and assurance of salvation: he is perfitly buried with Christ, doth perfitly put on Christ, and is perfitly made partaker of His resurrection. Therefore they are deceived that say no man is a perfit Christian that is not marked with this oil."⁵ Mr. Lampe adds his comment that Jewel's protest was largely justified. He thinks that to admit a distinction between water-baptism "unto the forgiveness of sins" and confirmation or spirit-baptism, which might be called the sealing of a Christian, would be to reduce the baptism established by Christ to the level of John's baptism. Oddly enough, that is exactly what some Eastern exponents of the liturgy made of it. For instance, the *Expositio officiorum ecclesiae*,⁶ attributed to George of Arbela (*fl.* 700), thus describes the series of liturgical acts at an initiation:

⁴ *Works*, I (Edited for the Parker Society; Cambridge: University Press, 1848), 277.

⁵ *Works*, II (Edited for the Parker Society; Cambridge: University Press, 1847), 1126.

⁶ It was edited from the Syriac by R. H. Connolly, O.S.B., *Anonymi auctoris Expositio officiorum ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta*, I (*CSCO*, LXIV, Syr. XXV [= former *Scriptores Syri*, series secunda, XCI, textus]; Paris, 1911) and II (*CSCO*, LXXII, Syr. XXIX [= former *Scriptores Syri*, series secunda, XCII, textus]; Paris, 1913). There is a Latin version by Connolly under the same title, I (*CSCO*, LXXI, Syr. XXVIII [= former *Scriptores Syri*, series secunda, XCI, versio]; Paris, 1913) and II (*CSCO*, LXXVI, Syr. XXXII [= former *Scriptores Syri*, series secunda, XCII, versio]; Paris, 1915). The pages that deal with baptism and confirmation, including the passages quoted in this article, are to be found in *Expositio*, II; in the Latin version of Connolly, *CSCO*, LXXVI, 96-98. Some would place the work in the ninth century.

Prima signatio (*rušmā*) ea est, qua beatus Abraham a Deo signatus fuit. Unde et haec signatio in fronte signatur . . .

Unctio baptizandorum (*mēšihūhā*) ea est quae fuit in Aaron et filios eius et reges.

Baptismus (*ʾāmādhā*) in Iordane est Iohannis baptismus in remissionem peccatorum.

Ultima obsignatio (*ḥuttāmā*) est baptismus Domini nostri; nam et perfectio est in Spiritu sancto.

That there is no confusion in this Monophysite Syriac author between baptisms is made quite clear by what he says very soon:

In baptismo, dum dicit "In nomine" Trinitatis, ter quoque baptizat: nomen ostendit, et rem facto perficit. In obsignatione (*ḥuttāmā*) vero—quia Spiritus descendit velut linguae ignis et super singulos sedit—obsignationem quoque in summa parte faciei baptizati facit, imitans illam promissionem Abrahae factam.

The sequence of ideas seems to be that, just as Christ went down into the Jordan and was baptized with John's baptism, coming up afterwards from the water and being then "anointed" as Messiah by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon Him, so the catechumen goes down into the water for baptism, ascends to where the bishop is seated, and is by him sealed with the Spirit. This sequence has been noticed and applied to Christian initiation from the days of Clement of Alexandria onwards.⁷ Mr. Lampe has much to say about it, but in the end he is forced to maintain (p. 42) that the word *εὐθὺς* in Mark's account of the baptism (Mark 1:10) must synchronize the baptism of Jesus in the water and the descent of the Spirit, while the accounts in Matthew and Luke have allowed the two events to become separated in time. In view of the frequency of Mark's use of *εὐθὺς* as an inferential conjunction meaning little more than "so then," this is an extremely narrow foundation for so weighty a conclusion. Even in its temporal sense the word would make the Spirit's descent simultaneous not with the actual baptism but with the ascent of Jesus from the water, and would not be a satisfactory reason for saying that it was the baptism which gave Him the Spirit.

It is an irony of circumstance that the chief evidence to which Mr. Lampe would have to appeal, if he sought to prove that Christian baptism was different from John's baptism, would be the passage of Acts 19:1-7 which tells of the disciples at Ephesus and the laying on of hands by Paul after they have been baptized. But this episode Mr. Lampe treats as far from

⁷ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, I, 6, 25 (GCS, Clem. Alex., I, 105).

typical. He follows Cullmann in thinking that, because Ephesus was a focal point in Paul's ministry, these disciples had to be associated with his apostolic activity by a special ceremony which was not usual with other converts. The same reason would, he holds, explain the journey of Peter and John to Samaria to lay hands upon Philip's converts. Thus the case for an apostolic practice of confirmation by laying on of hand is thought to be removed at one blow, even though, as I have said, this treatment of the Ephesus episode as non-typical deprives Mr. Lampe of his main argument for distinguishing Christian baptism from John's. It is, of course, true that confirmation makes a man active in the defence of his faith and gives him a certain participation in the priesthood of Christ, but why this should be considered necessary at Ephesus and in Samaria but nowhere else, not even at the much more central missionary city of Antioch, Mr. Lampe does not succeed in showing. The argument from silence, if used in this sweeping fashion, would lead to the conclusion that no Apostle did any preaching save Peter and Paul.

The testimony of Irenaeus to the fact that laying on of hands imparted the Spirit⁸ is taken by Mr. Lampe—who is here in agreement with Dix—to mean that Irenaeus is speaking of what the Apostles did in exceptional cases, not of what could be done at confirmation in his own day. But the whole purport of Irenaeus' reference to Acts is against this view. Irenaeus says that Paul spoke to the Corinthians (I Cor. 3:2) of their only being fit for milk and not yet for solid food because they had not yet received the Spirit of the Father. "Paul was able to give them that food—for on whomsoever the Apostles imposed hands, to them the Spirit was given, and He is the food of life—but they could not yet receive the Spirit because the senses of their souls were still weak and unpractised in the exercise that leads to God." It would be strange indeed if Irenaeus was ignorant of I Pet. 2:2, *Ep. Barn.* 6, the numerous references to the milk given to the newly-baptized that occur in the *Odes of Solomon*, and the practice of his own day, when milk and honey were given to the newly-baptized. Awareness of this without a corresponding awareness that the strong meat of the Spirit was also given by the ritual of the Church, would make Irenaeus to appear almost feeble-minded. In fact, he does distinguish between the remission of sins and the raising to the life of God, both of them produced in us by the Spirit of the Father.⁹ He also speaks of our reception of the Spirit from the abundance of Christ's anointing which came upon Him after His baptism.¹⁰ The

⁸ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, IV, 63, 1 (Harvey, II, 294).

⁹ *Ibid.*, V, 9, 1 (Harvey, II, 342): "Quotquot . . . credunt . . . habent Spiritum Patris, qui emundat hominem, et sublevat in vitam Dei."

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, III, 10 (Harvey, II, 33).

Lord's command to baptize gave the disciples the "potestas regenerationis in Deum," while the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost gave them a "potestas omnium gentium ad introitum vitae et ad apertionem novi testamenti."¹¹ In the same passage he makes the cryptic comment that our bodies by the *lavacrum* receive the unity which makes for incorruption (perhaps the unity in the death of Christ which baptism portrayed), while our souls receive unity by means of the Spirit. Baptism for little ones and the reception of the Spirit which brings us to adult status would seem to be the basic idea of Irenaeus in all these passages, and this accords with his distinction of the activity of the Trinity in our regard, whereby the Father is thought of as ordering man's formation in the image *and likeness* (and not in image alone) of God, the Son carries this out and forms him, the Spirit gives increase and brings to perfection.¹² The briefer references to baptism in the *Epideixis* are quite indecisive about the parts or moments into which that rite was thought by Irenaeus to be divided. I have examined his texts at some length, since it was necessary to show by example how weak is the case which Mr. Lampe has striven to build up. One can readily agree with Thornton's concluding remark in his reply: "If the mystery of Christian initiation be thought of as a whole present in its parts then we might expect a certain fluctuation of language suggesting an interchange of properties between the parts; and this in fact is what the evidence seems to show."

The real ground for testing such a theory should be its presence or absence in the prayers of the ritual used in the early Church, and in the explanations given of these prayers at the time. Now it is on these that the theory really breaks down. Hippolytus was claimed by Mr. Lampe as "an early witness for a distinction between 'regeneration by the Holy Spirit' as the inward thing signified by water-baptism, and 'grace to serve God according to His will' as the blessing particularly associated with the bishop's post-baptismal prayer and with the subsidiary ceremonies" (p. 141). To reach this conclusion he used the Latin version of Hippolytus' *Traditio apostolica* in preference to the Oriental ones, a preference which is very hard to justify; but in later discussion he has spoken with less confidence in the value of this evidence. It is true that the Latin version gives a prayer for the bishop to use after baptism (when the candidates come to him for the imposition of hand), in which baptism is said to give the Holy Ghost.¹³ But this Latin prayer is not supported by the other versions.¹⁴

¹¹ *Ibid.*, III, 18, 1 (Harvey, II, 92).

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, IV, 63, 2 (Harvey, II, 296).

¹³ Hippolytus, *Traditio apostolica*, XXII, 1 (Dix, p. 38): "Dñe Dñs, qui dignos fecisti eos remissionem mereri peccatorum per lauacrum regenerationis spūs sc̄i, inmitte in eos tuam gratiam, ut tibi seruiant. . . ."

¹⁴ The Ethiopic, e.g., reads: "God, who hast made these worthy of the washing of

An earlier Latin form of the confirmation prayer is extant in the Arian fragments published by Cardinal Mai.¹⁵ Here the Arian writer complains that the orthodox Christians themselves subordinate Son to Father in their liturgy when at confirmation they use a formula which speaks of the Father of Jesus doing the work of regeneration. The date Mai assigned to his fragments was the late fourth or early fifth century, though Löwe in *Codices latini antiquiores* (Vatican, 31) inclines to put it about a century later. Even so, the prayer it contains must have been in use by 400 to allow the Arians to make use of it in attacking the Catholics. One can see how from this simple form the more elaborate form that is found in the Latin version of Hippolytus or in Ambrose¹⁶ (if one can trust the text of that passage in the absence of a critical edition) might have originated, but the opposite process of stripping down the longer prayer to a simpler form is less explicable. In particular, the agreement of the Arian fragments with the Ethiopic version of Hippolytus¹⁷ is too remarkable to have been the result of a later deliberate adaptation; whereas the signs of fluctuation that appear in texts of the opposite style, such as the Sacramentary of Bergamo and the Gelasianum, are indicative of greater modifications that the text has undergone.

A group of liturgical formulae for the blessing of the chrism and the conferring of the seal in confirmation may be of some help in determining the nature of that seal, though they are not mentioned by Mr. Lampe. They are found embedded in the Ethiopic version of Hippolytus¹⁸ and seem to give two Offices for baptism. I have discussed them elsewhere¹⁹ and need only remark here that Hippolytean authorship was suggested for certain portions of them as long ago as 1906 by von der Goltz. In the Preface for blessing the chrism, the bishop prays "that it may become an unction of holiness and seal of the Holy Spirit upon every person of those who receive

new birth, and of the forgiveness of sin, make them worthy to be filled with thy Holy Spirit. . . ."

¹⁵ Angelo Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio* (10 vols.; Rome, 1825-38), III/2, 222; also in *Studi e testi*, VII (1902), 55: "Ipsi in benedictionibus suis praeponunt Patrem Filio dum dicunt: Deus et pater Dñi nostri Iesu Christi, qui te regeneravit ex aqua, Ipse te linet Spiritu sancto. . . ."

¹⁶ Ambrose, *De sacramentis*, II, 7, 24 (*Florilegium patristicum*, VII, 150): "Deus . . . pater omnipotens, qui te regeneravit ex aqua et spiritu sancto concessitque tibi peccata tua, ipse te ungit in vitam aeternam."

¹⁷ The Ethiopic version was very probably made direct from the Greek, though its mss., none of which is older than 1400, may have been revised in the light of an Arabic version in the Middle Ages. Parallel phenomena are observed in the Ethiopic version of the Scriptures.

¹⁸ Cf. G. Horner, *The Statutes of the Apostles* (London, 1904), pp. 162-78.

¹⁹ Cf. J. Crehan, *Early Christian Baptism and the Creed* (London, 1950), pp. 169-70.

the washing of regeneration and forgiveness . . . : and may it be to them redemption and sure grace and a holy seal of unction and communion of their nature with the Holy Spirit; and cause that they may be named (his) temple. . . .”²⁰ The formula for chrismation is: “Eternal God . . . who hast regenerated us thy servants and thy handmaids by water and the Holy Spirit in the washing of regeneration . . . send now upon them the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. . . .”²¹ Moreover, a concluding prayer is given, which is to be said after Communion and which lists the three graces received as “the forgiveness of sin,” “the grace of the Holy Spirit,” and “the Body and Blood of Christ.”²²

Men seal documents, or wells (if they are Orientals), or even temples (if they are Jews).²³ It may be that the image that was in the mind of those early Christians who spoke of a sealing that followed baptism was that of the new covenant with God in baptism which was thus being sealed; but the idea of sealing the temple of the Holy Ghost so that it could not become the resort of seven devils can hardly have been absent from their minds. It is a pity that Mr. Lampe has not more carefully analysed and grouped the many texts which he has collected on the point, for it might then be possible to advance nearer to a solution of the apparent conflict between those who call confirmation the seal, those who use the word for baptism, and those who seem to make of it a compendium referring to the whole rite. Thornton has rightly rejected the suggestion made by Lampe that the use of unction at the laying on of hand in confirmation came into Christianity from the Marcosian heretics; such a view pays no heed to the force of tradition in all religious rites and above all in the Catholic Church. It may be that further light on these uncertainties will come from the working out of the Old Testament typology dear to the earliest Christian writers, but it cannot be said that Mr. Lampe has cleared up the question of the seal. This interim report may have indicated some of the points of disturbance in the matter and may suffice to show how many problems still await a solution.

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²⁰ Horner, p. 169.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 178.

²³ Cf. Daniel, LXX, “Bel et Draco,” 14.