

Appendix 2: Church Life Ruined by Infant Baptism

In this Appendix, I call on further testimony from one who knew what he is talking about – David F. Wright:

Of [infant] baptism, it is commonly claimed that its recipients are incorporated into the body of Christ, become members of the church... Now unless this assertion... is given such a spiritual or metaphysical meaning that its truthfulness is wholly inaccessible to the social scientist or historian, it must surely entail membership of the visible church on earth. It would be strange, would it not, if, of hundreds of baptised persons of whom this was predicated over a period of time, none was subsequently found... at worship or engaged in some essential church activity? I am not forgetting that evangelical Christians have traditionally made much of the doctrine of the invisible church, but we should be cautious to summon this into play at this juncture. What this unfortunately-named doctrine really stands for, is the important biblical teaching that only God knows those who are his, and that not all in the visible company of the church thereby truly belong to God. The doctrine of the invisible church is not about a totally different entity from the visible church – except insofar as it embraces those who have died, and joined the heavenly host of God. It is at base, a statement, paradoxically enough, about the visible church, affirming its mixed, imperfect character. I reject its being invoked to accommodate the embarrassing verifiable results of hundreds, thousands, even millions of infant baptisms which have not led to their recipients being verifiably members of the church of Jesus Christ. Let us not beat about the bush... When all the caveats and qualifications have been factored in, there are undoubtedly hordes more people who were baptised as infants in the Church of Scotland [for instance], and are today, to all intents and purposes, wholly unchurched, than there are members of the same church... This paper-membership itself has only a partial purchase on reality; the rule of thumb in the Kirk is that, of the formal membership in any

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one congregation, a third are active, another third come to special services like communion and Easter, and a third are never seen... [not forgetting the 'hordes' who never make any profession at all – DG]. The state of affairs, thus exposed, confronts infant baptism with some hard questions... [It is worse than useless to try to drive along] escape routes which biblical Christians can scarcely take seriously... We might conclude that for some who minister in one of these mixed churches, the price of continuing to dispense baptism to babies, is not believing too much about it. This is hardly a satisfactory position to find oneself in, but then, the administration of infant baptism has been for some time one of the most conscience-taxing aspects of the work of the ministry for many evangelicals.

In a recent survey, Wright continued, the Church of Scotland discovered that demand for:

...baptism for any who wanted [80%], and denying it had any bearing on later church attendance [100%] – starkly illustrates what 'the long reign of infant baptism' has done to baptism.

Wright spoke of:

...the pressure to come to terms – serious conscientious terms – with baptism given so widely to infants, and so infrequently leading to active discipleship. If baptism, administered indiscriminately to babies on request, proves so ineffectual, it cannot retain much doctrinal significance. The logic is simple and unchallengeable... If infant baptism counts for so little, carries so little clout, why bother resisting, often at some emotional cost, requests for it from parents who show next to no sign of genuine commitment to it? Anglican evangelicals, not so long ago, had the habit of talking about such baptismal occasions as 'good boats to fish from', that is, welcome evangelistic opportunities. Such is the colour of a baptismally-reductionist church culture.¹

Infant baptisers, not excluding Reformed infant-baptisers, will need a large carpet, a well-bristled broom, and a strong

¹ David F. Wright: *What...?* pp24-25,83-87,100-102.

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forearm, if they want to hide such testimony. For all the seeming poise of infant baptisers when writing about their practice, and for all their apparent confidence in the covenant theology which buttresses it, in private and in conscience many are wrestling with enormous doubts and difficulties. From time to time these doubts come into the public arena.²

The lesson from all this? Start with Scripture, not theology or a Confession!

² Take for instance H.M.Carson: *Farewell to Anglicanism*, Henry E.Walter Ltd., Worthing, 1969, pp60-77.