

# Consequence 1

## *Christendom and Visible Churches*

Leaving aside all the ins-and-outs of the arguments about infant baptism, all the Reformed assertions and counter-qualifiers, let's get down to the nitty-gritty. What is the practical outcome of infant baptism? What has been its great 'contribution' to the world, its massive legacy? What 'benefit' has it bestowed on humanity?

In a word, Christendom! What is Christendom? It is that grotesque, Satanic invention – that conglomeration of Church and State, in which citizenship and Church membership are one and the same – in which millions of unregenerate babies are 'made' 'Christians' by 'priests' or 'ministers' who exercise sacramental powers through baptism, these babies then being called 'Christians' and Church members, and treated as such (at birth, through life, and at death).<sup>1</sup> Wright:

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<sup>1</sup> 'Christian', a noun in the Bible, *and only a noun*, has become an adjective – and one of the most (if not *the* most) debased, at that. Those parents who want the full works for their child, start as they mean to go on: the baby is made a 'Christian' at the font, given a 'Christian' name at his 'Christening', is a member of a 'Christian' Church, lives in a 'Christian' country in a 'Christian' continent ruled by 'Christian' kings and princes, attends a 'Christian' school, a 'Christian' university or college, and when old enough (and if the need arises) becomes a 'Christian' soldier to fight in a 'Christian' army for a 'Christian' cause, annually remembering the 'Christian' fallen in battle. Finally, he himself is given a 'Christian' funeral, conducted by a 'Christian' minister, and, supposedly, goes to heaven. And it is all eye-wash! But highly dangerous, even so. Never seeming to learn from history, since 9/11 we are in danger of stirring up the spirit of the Crusades again, and another war between 'Christianity' and Islam is not out of the question. George W. Bush talked about 'a crusade against evil', did he not, and I myself heard an American soldier serving in Iraq claim he was in 'God's army' fighting on behalf of 'God's country', or some-such terminology (Dec. 2005). As in my *Battle*, I urge the principles of Matt. 26:52; John 18:36; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph 6:10-20. I have allowed 'church' to be qualified by 'Christian' in my quotations only because that is what my sources wrote. Above all, the danger is not only temporal. The consequences of Christendom will prove ruinous for millions, eternally speaking. See Stuart Murray: *Post-Christendom* for its legacy.

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Universal infant baptism was one of the constitutive elements of the unitary world of Church-State Christianity which is what Christendom commonly denotes... This universal baptising of babies formed one of the building blocks of Christendom,<sup>2</sup> by which I mean that long phase of Christian history during which the Church and the civil order, whether people, nation or empire, were largely co-terminus. Human society consisted of a single population, viewed from one angle as the Christian Church, from another as a State. Characteristic of Christendom was the State Church, the Church legally 'established', or recognised as the privileged Church of the nation or empire. Christendom began to develop under the earliest 'Christian' emperors of Rome, from Constantine in the early 4th century onwards, and survived the disruption of the Reformation largely unscathed. The re-formed Churches which came out of the Reformation, were State Churches or national Churches, whether Lutheran, Reformed or Presbyterian, or Anglican... [In this way,] baptismal development [that is, the introduction of infant baptism] [brought about] a truly massive change in the history of Christ's church. From being a company recruited by intentional response to the gospel imperative to discipleship and baptism, it became a body enrolled from birth. It was arguably one<sup>3</sup> of the greatest sea changes in the story of

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<sup>2</sup> 'Theologically, [Augustine] came to believe that infant baptism was the sole cure for the guilt of original sin; practically, he came to advocate the universal baptism of infants soon after their birth. The result was a devaluation of baptism in the West, which did much to determine the contours of Christendom' (Wright in Stuart Murray: *Post-Christendom* p91).

<sup>3</sup> *The greatest*, in my opinion. In the New Testament, pagans were converted into Christians by God's grace through faith and repentance; in Christendom, pagans are called Christians and treated as such, by baptising them as babies, either because they are thought to be Christians already, or else claiming to make them so. W. Brock: In the New Testament, 'all who came to believe in Christ with their heart, and to confess... Christ with their tongue, [and were baptised upon profession of faith,] were the members of his church, and no one else. There was no birth-membership, no sacramental membership, no proxy membership. The whole matter was personal' (*Sword* p414). See Brock's entire article for his submission that national Churches, the Church of England in particular, are not the church of Jesus Christ.

Spurgeon: 'We think that our brethren do serious damage to the gospel by baptising children. We do not think their error a little one... Infant baptism is the prop and pillar of Popery, and it being removed, Popery and Puseyism become at once impossible. You have taken away all idea of a national godliness and a national religion, when you have cut away all liberty to administer Christian ordinances to unconverted persons. We cannot see any

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Christianity. It led... to the formation of Christendom, comprising a 'Christian' empire, 'Christian' nations or peoples. Christianity became a matter of heredity, not decision.<sup>4</sup>

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evil which would follow, if our brethren would renounce their mistake; but we can see abundant mischief which their mistake has caused, and in all kindness, but with all fidelity, we again enter our solemn protest against their giving baptism to any but disciples... Oh! It is a disastrous thing to call unconverted children Christians, or to do anything which may weaken their apprehension of the great fact that, until they are converted, they have no part or lot in this matter. Brethren, if you differ from me on this point, bear with me, for my conscience will not let me conceal this solemn truth' (Spurgeon: *New Park Street and Metropolitan* Vol.7 p284; see also pp265-272).

<sup>4</sup> Wright: *What...?* pp9,12,74. Lusk: 'Infant baptism and Christendom stand or fall together' (Lusk: 'Paedobaptism' p117). Wright saw the current days, 'the dying days of Christendom', as he put it, as a good time to re-think baptism. As I have explained, he would have liked to have seen a higher status for infant baptism, a more sacramental approach. This, I am convinced is wrong and will lead to a new Christendom replacing the old, but still built on the old foundation – infant baptism. Satan is too wily to let such a powerful weapon slip from his fingers! How will the new Christendom come about? Here is my suggestion: Many Baptists and Reformed infant-baptisers (theologians in the van) will come together as sacramentalists (discussions between both parties have been going on since the late 1970s), and Rome will move just enough to bring them within range and so swallow them alive! 'Recent trends in ecumenical [that is, Romanist and Protestant] reflection on baptism must be regarded as favourable to Baptists' fundamental demand for baptism on profession of faith. Believer's Baptists now have an unprecedented opportunity to promote a theology of baptism which confidently takes the full measure of the New Testament witness and no longer feeds on reaction against the distorting effects of the long reign of infant baptism' (Wright: *What...?* pp9,31; see also Wright: *What...?* p28; see earlier notes on the Romeward movement amongst evangelicals, and Rome's changes, including Wright: *What...?* pp10,15-17,102; see also Jones pp105-129; Beckwith). I am sure Wright would have thought I am doing the latter (reacting against infant baptism) (to which, in this book, I plead guilty), when he would wish the former – a return to sacramentalism. Increasingly, his wish is being fulfilled. See my book on Baptist sacramentalism, where I trace this out in detail with regard to Baptists, the ecumenical movement, the charismatic movement, the New Perspective, conversion regarded as a process, the emphasis upon corporate as opposed to individual salvation, the union of believer's baptism and infant baptism, and inclusivism. In addition to what I say there, take Buchanan and Vasey who recorded a case of an Anglican lady, 'an

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Constantine provided the political muscle necessary for this diabolical state of affairs. Who provided the theological logic for it? Augustine, of course. Wright again: ‘Augustine of Hippo, who died in 430... It was he who provided the theology that led to infant baptism becoming

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evangelical charismatic’, who, at the 1991 synod, pressed for ‘open baptism’; that is, indiscriminate infant baptism. She said: ‘The most critical thing for those coming in, is not primarily the grasping of concepts, but the need for them to be networked into a series of relationships within the Body of Christ’. No wonder ‘a solid majority’ of the synod – in favour of ‘open baptism’ – ‘was uncomfortable... at attempts to sharpen the boundaries of the Church’ (Buchanan and Vasey p11; but see their pp23-24). Consider this from N.T.Wright, explaining how he became a sacramentalist: ‘In 1981... my view of the eucharist, which had started at a rock-bottom low as an undergraduate, had received an upward jolt through reading Calvin (yes, try it and see)... It finally came together and started to approach that of Paul [which is, of course, to beg the question – DG]’. In a further piece, N.T.Wright went on to set out what he understood by justification: ‘Justification... is God’s declaration that the person is now in the right, which confers on them the status “righteous”. (We may note that, since “righteous” here, within the law-court metaphor, refers to “status”, not “character”, we correctly say that God’s declaration makes the person “righteous”, that is, in good standing)... This present declaration constitutes all believers as the single people, the one family, promised to Abraham (Gal. 2:14 – 3:29; Rom. 3:27 – 4:17), the people whose sins have been dealt with as part of the fulfilled promise of covenant renewal (Jer. 31:31-34)’. I pause. Excellent. I agree wholeheartedly. Now – the question is: How does a sinner come into this position? how is he declared righteous by God? on what basis? through what means? N.T.Wright went on: ‘The event in the present, which corresponds to Jesus’ death and resurrection in the past, and the resurrection of all believers in the future, is baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:26-29; Rom. 6:2-11)’. I pause again. It is the old question: Which baptism was Paul talking about? water baptism or spiritual baptism? N.T.Wright was in no doubt: ‘Baptism is not, as some have supposed, a “work” which one “performs” to earn God’s favour. It is, for Paul [begging the question again – DG], the sacrament of God’s free grace. Paul can speak of those who have believed, and been baptised, as already “saved”, albeit “in hope” (Rom. 8:24)’ (*Act 3 Review* pp202-204). Quite! But N.T.Wright has mixed up the two baptisms and given the impression – to put it no stronger – that water baptism is a sacrament which produces (or helps to produce) the status of justification. As I have said, I believe all this ties in with the idea of ‘initiation’ rather than conversion. See Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ p123. Reader: What would Paul have made of this – would it fairly represent his view of conversion?

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general practice for the first time in the history of the Church',<sup>5</sup> which, as I have explained, was later sharpened by Lombard in the 12th century.

So what is so very bad about this 'Christendom'? C.H.Mackintosh put it like this:

It is a terrible word. It brings before us, at once, that vast mass of baptised profession, which calls itself the church of God, but is not; which calls itself Christianity, but is not. Christendom is dark and a dreadful anomaly. It is neither one thing nor the other... It is a corrupt mysterious mixture, a spiritual malformation, the masterpiece of Satan, the corrupter of the truth of God, and the destroyer of the souls of men, a trap, a snare, a stumbling block, the darkest moral blot in the universe of God. It is the corruption of the very best thing, and therefore, the very worst of corruptions. It is that thing which Satan has made of professing Christianity. It is worse, by far, than... all the darkest forms of Paganism, because it has higher light and richer privileges, makes the very highest profession, and occupies the very loftiest platform. Finally, it is that awful apostasy for which is reserved the very heaviest judgement of God – the most bitter dregs in the cup of his righteous wrath.<sup>6</sup>

Scare mongering? Reformed infant-baptisers, no doubt, will dismiss the above as the *corruption* of infant baptism; their observance of the rite, they would claim, is a million miles away from it. We shall see.

So much for the general picture. What of the local manifestation? Infant baptisers make much of the notion of 'visible churches'.<sup>7</sup> It is a concept which has come up repeatedly. A class of Christians is invented – 'visible' Christians, that is, professed Christians, or those

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<sup>5</sup> Wright: *What...?* p12; see also Wright: *What...?* pp25-26,94. Luther, it will be remembered, was an Augustinian monk; and Calvin's dependence on Augustine is legendary. As I have noted, theologians always provide the theology required to back up an invented practice. For Augustine's baptismal theology in his own words, see Appendix 2.

<sup>6</sup> C.H.Mackintosh: *Papers on the Lord's Coming*, pp73-74, quoted by Weber pp170-171. See Diprose pp131-135. 'The Anabaptists... opposed... infant baptism, including fundamentally the Church-State alliance, and the use of the coercive powers of State authorities in defence of the new Protestantism. Infant baptism belonged to the complex... called "Christendom", which survived, albeit much transformed, the turmoil of the Reformation' (Wright: *What...?* p29).

<sup>7</sup> As so much in this field, another of Augustine's inventions. See Morgan p3. But not only infant baptisers; sadly, the majority of Baptists use the phrase.

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who claim to be Christians; nominal Christians, or those who are not openly non-Christian. Churches composed of this sort of people are visible churches.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> But even this does not work. ‘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 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]. 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, 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

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It goes without saying that all believers must be open (or visible) in their testimony: ‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven’ (Matt. 5:16). There is no quarrel over that. But the concept of visible churches is not dealing with this command of Christ. Oh no! It is an attempt or invention to cope with the utter disaster of Constantinian and Augustinian practice, in general, and of infant baptism, in particular.<sup>9</sup> Alas, in these days many churches – even among those which ought to understand the folly and mistake of the concept of visible churches – are acting on those very principles. Instead of insisting on clear evidences of regeneration before baptism and church membership, a mere nominal profession is considered enough. It is a dreadful

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“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’ (Wright: *What...?* pp24-25,83-87,100-102). Infant baptisers, not excluding Reformed infant-baptisers, will need a large carpet, a well-bristled broom, and a strong 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. Take for instance Carson: *Farewell* pp60-77.

<sup>9</sup> Some, at least, of the Reformed, are not apologetic about this; they see it as biblical: ‘Baptism is the symbolic linguistic crucible of regeneration and new birth which gives form to the substance of faith in Christ. Therein, regeneration is signified by our being gathered to a people where the Holy Spirit works through our existence in the church to conform us to Christ. Through baptism, we enter this mode of existence, either willingly as adults, or unwillingly as infants... This is the essence of a Reformed understanding of the church’ (Harvey p111). Note the word – ‘the *essence* of a Reformed understanding of the church’.

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mistake. It is worse; it is a contradiction of Scripture. And it will bring havoc in its wake. Indeed it is already doing so.<sup>10</sup>

The notion of visible churches is an idea which is very handy for infant baptisers, but it is entirely foreign to the New Testament. It is more than handy – it is essential for them to think of something to cope with what they find in their churches. As there was an ‘Israel after the flesh’ (1 Cor. 10:18), so the practice of infant baptism must inevitably produce some ‘Christians after the flesh’;<sup>11</sup> that is, those who have one or more parents who are Christians, who have been baptised and admitted into the church, who are called holy, members of Christ and Christians, when all the time they are unregenerate. What can infant baptisers do with them?

Listen to the way A.A.Hodge described the practical outworkings of infant baptism in terms of church membership. He quoted *The Directory for Worship* with approval when he wrote:

It is evident that this [baptism of infants] should be supplemented by the rite of confirmation... I refer simply to the historical, universally-practised [universally?] Christian ordinance observed in bringing the Christianly instructed and trained children before the church ‘when they come to years of discretion: if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady, and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord’s body, they ought to be informed it is their duty and their privilege to come to the Lord’s supper’. Then they who have been members of the church from their birth are admitted to full communion, and are confirmed in their church standing, upon their voluntarily taking upon themselves the vows originally imposed upon them by their parents in baptism. This is the CONFIRMATION, separated from the abortive mask of the so-called

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<sup>10</sup> I recall a conversation with a Presbyterian minister. He told me there were 400 members in ‘his’ church. How many at the prayer meeting?, I asked. 40, he replied. The trouble is, he explained, we have an unregenerate elder, and we are waiting for him to die! The overwhelming majority of Baptist churches, too, seem willing to accept such a disproportionate attendance. It is, of course, not the attendance which counts here; it is the attitude which is reflected in such figures. Can it be that 90% of the church are otherwise properly engaged, and to their great disappointment are unable to attend the prayer meeting?

<sup>11</sup> And the disaster occurs not only in infant-baptiser churches. I recall Harry Matthews of Corsham ‘fame’, some 40 years ago, saying: ‘There are too many Ishmaels in the church’. He was talking about evangelical and Baptist churches.



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sacrament, that John Calvin declared was an ancient and beneficial custom, which he earnestly wished might be continued in the church.<sup>12</sup>

Well, A.A.Hodge and Calvin might have wished this sort of procedure to continue long in the church, but in the light of the New Testament, words fail to describe just how abominable it is. The New Testament churches were composed of saints – nothing at all to do with age.<sup>13</sup> How infant baptisers are infatuated with age! But here it is in black and white; all that infant baptisers demand is for an infant to be baptised, then to be ‘Christianly’ brought up, ‘free from scandal, appear sober and steady, and to have sufficient knowledge’, before they become full members of a church. Full members? What is this? The New Testament knows nothing of this *full* membership. Nothing at all! It is a piece of pure invention by infant baptisers, remarkably, as before, often the very people who call loudest for the Regulative Principle!<sup>14</sup> Further, where in the New Testament does baptism have to be ‘supplemented’ as Hodge put it? Church members, according to the New Testament, are saints; they are true believers who give clear evidences and marks of regeneration in their lives. This stands in sharp contrast to the infant baptism system which, apparently, can produce adults who are communicant or full church members but who, nevertheless, are not required to be regenerate, only reasonably decent. Indeed, this is what the Presbyterian Church looks for, according to its *Directory* for worship. They will be steady and sober – or appear to be. But is that *all*? Is that sufficient for church membership? What if some of these steady, sober unregenerate men become preachers, elders and teachers? And they do. Of course they do. It is inevitable. The consequences are horrendous. As Maurice Roberts, the then-editor of the *Banner of Truth*, himself a Presbyterian minister, wrote in his editorial in the April 1994 issue:

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<sup>12</sup> A.A.Hodge p337. Note how infant baptism – itself an invention – demands a further invention – confirmation – to supplement it.

<sup>13</sup> I have made the point, more than once, that baptism is nothing to do with age. But this does not mean those who baptise believers pay no regard to it whatsoever. The real question, however, is not the age itself, but does the one being baptised give a credible profession of faith?

<sup>14</sup> See above.

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Let a man become a church member without the new birth and the probability is he will be secure in his church membership till he wakes up in a lost world. Let a man become a preacher, a divinity professor, a missionary, a church historian, a moderator, an assembly clerk, a printer of Bibles – all without the new birth – and such persons are only twofold more the heirs of hell than they would otherwise have been (Matt. 23:15). However hard it is for us to take in this doctrine, there cannot be the least doubt that it is the plain and obvious teaching of Christ in many places of the Gospels.<sup>15</sup>

All who would be thought a Christian should weigh these words. All elders should, especially. But, in particular, infant baptisers need to pay close attention to them, for the reasons I have given – reasons which arise directly out of their own principles and which have been made abundantly clear by their own writings. To be regenerate is not the same as being ‘Christianly’ brought up – whatever that may be reckoned to mean – or to ‘be free from scandal, appear to be sober and steady’.

How do infant baptisers try to justify this abomination of knowingly accepting unregenerate church members?<sup>16</sup> They grossly abuse the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30), conveniently saying that the field is the church when it is nothing of the sort; the field is *the world*. They expect – and their system produces – churches which are composed of members, some of whom are regenerate and baptised, some of whom are adults who have been baptised but are unregenerate, and some of whom are baptised infants but who give no evidence one way or the other concerning regeneration. What a mixed multitude! This inevitably leads on to the idea of visible churches. The Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV, put it this way: ‘The visible church... consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children’.<sup>17</sup> The main text chosen to serve as a

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<sup>15</sup> *Banner of Truth* April 1994 p2.

<sup>16</sup> It is more than knowingly. Dabney, without batting an eyelid, was prepared to issue this challenge: ‘Cannot that which is worldly, in the true sense, be in the visible church?’ (Dabney p785). Of course, as I admit, those of us who want the New Testament basis of church life, and demand regenerate church membership, can be deceived; we do not always get it right! But this is a far cry from virtually *boasting* of carnal members. See Shawn D. Wright pp218-228.

<sup>17</sup> Westminster p107.

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proof-text to substantiate this defective and misguided definition is 1 Corinthians 1:2 which reads:

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

It will be readily observed that the text quoted does not support the Confession in the slightest. The Confession speaks of church members as those who profess true religion, whereas the New Testament speaks of church members as those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, who are called to be saints, and who call upon Christ. Professors, says the one; saints, says the other! Not the same thing at all. The other verses quoted are 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Psalm 2:8, Revelation 7:9 and Romans 15:9-12, none of which say that church members are mere professors.

The Confession also says that church members are professors *and their children*. The ‘proof’ text, 1 Corinthians 1:2, says nothing of the sort. 1 Corinthians 7:14 is also quoted. I have already written about that verse, which, in any case, says nothing about church membership. Acts 2:39 is also referred to. Reader, may I suggest that you read the entire passage, Acts 2:37-42? Baptism comes in the verse preceding the proof-text, and church life comes in the verses which follow it. It reads: ‘For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’. Let us look at it.

The passage teaches that the gospel invitation, command or promise (which Peter issued in his preaching on the Day of Pentecost) is made to every man, woman and child in the world;<sup>18</sup> invitations, commands or promises such as: ‘Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!’ (Isa. 45:22). God’s promise – along with his command – is sent to both Jews and non-Jews, both young and old, as long as time shall last. God’s mercy is offered in the gospel to all sinners, not only to those who happened to hear it on the Day of Pentecost. The promise is sent to all men, women and children throughout the age. ‘God... commands all men everywhere to repent’ (Acts 17:30). But surely it does not need to be said, a sinner is saved only when the call is effectual and inward; it being ‘as many as the

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<sup>18</sup> See my *Offer*; my forthcoming book on Septimus Sears; Lloyd-Jones: *The Church* p40.

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Lord our God will call'. This caveat qualifies everything which follows. All are called outwardly, but it is only those who are effectually called – and it is all of *them* – who will repent and believe. 'As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed' (Acts 13:48). It is no different today. The elect believe. They are then to be baptised and thus join the church. 'Then those who gladly received his word were baptised' (Acts 2:41).<sup>19</sup> That is what Acts 2:37-42 teaches.

Infant baptisers, however, deny that the qualification, 'as many as the Lord our God will call', applies to all the classes mentioned, and which must be met before any are baptised. In particular, their view is that the children of those who are near do not need to be called before they are baptised and join the church, seeing they are born in the covenant. This is wrong. There are two issues here. *First*, to whom does the proviso – the calling – apply? And, *secondly*, were infants baptised that day?

On the *first*, it is clear that on the Day of Pentecost, the calling applied to all the categories of people, and to all the issues involved. Whether the people were near or far off, adults or children, they all needed to be called. And the believing, the repenting, the being baptised and joining the church, all came under that one stipulation. It was only those who were effectively called – and only those – who repented, believed, were baptised, and so on. The context proves it. That is exactly what happened. It was only those who repented (Acts 2:38) and 'who gladly received his word' – that is those who truly believed (Acts 2:44) – who were baptised and were added to the church to partake in all its life (Acts 2:41-42). In other words, all who were effectively called, were baptised, and only they. It did not matter a scrap whether they were Jews or Gentiles;<sup>20</sup> they had to be called. In this way they joined the church and partook of all the ordinances of Christ including the Lord's supper.

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<sup>19</sup> Implying that there were some who did not receive his word, and were not baptised – even though they had been outwardly called in the general call of the gospel. See my forthcoming book on Septimus Sears.

<sup>20</sup> True it is, on that day, the vast majority (if not all) who heard and were called were Jews or proselytes. But the principle stands.

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Now for the *second* point. There is not the slightest suggestion that infants were involved in any of it.<sup>21</sup> Did they prophesy (Acts 2:17)? No! Did they repent and believe? No! And if infant baptisers persist in saying that infants were involved, and that infants were baptised, then we are forced to conclude that Peter must have exhorted those infants to repent and be baptised. This must be so since we know that he urged all those, whom he later baptised, to ‘repent, and let every one of you be baptised’ (Acts 2:38). According to infant baptisers, that number included infants. But why ever would Peter exhort infants to repent, when he knew it was an impossibility for them by reason of their age? And why would he exhort the infants to be baptised, in any case? On infant baptism logic, he was wasting his time! As long as one of the parents repented and was baptised, the infants followed automatically. So why would Peter exhort the infants to repent and be baptised? The answer is, of course, he did nothing of the kind. He only exhorted those of sufficient maturity in years, those who could hear, believe and repent; they were the ones whom he exhorted and subsequently baptised upon their profession of faith – not infants. Infants were not baptised on the Day of Pentecost.

On the verse Calvin wrote: ‘The promise was first made to the Jews, and then to their children, and last of all, that it is also to be imparted to the Gentiles’.<sup>22</sup> This comment raises an important,

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<sup>21</sup> But it says ‘the promise is to you and to your children’ (Acts 2:39). So it does. But this does not have to mean infants. Indeed, it is unlikely to have meant infants. When Paul stated: ‘That promise which was made to the fathers... God has fulfilled this for us their children’ (Acts 13:32-33), was he talking about *infants*? Of course not! The prophetic promise, given to men long before, had now been fulfilled to their descendants – this present generation. Likewise, Peter might well have been saying that God’s promise was not only for those hearing him that day, but for them and for those who would hear in future generations – as many as the Lord our God will call. Compare Deut. 29:29; Josh. 22:24-25; Ps. 78:4-6; 132:12; Matt. 27:25 *etc.*

<sup>22</sup> Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.18 Part 2 p122. Calvin thought ‘this place... abundantly refute[s] the manifest error of the Anabaptists, which will not have infants, which are the children of the faithful, to be baptised, as if they were not members of the church’. If Calvin was right, and the Anabaptists wrong, and all the children of believers (or nominally so) are ‘members of the church’, we must know what he meant by ‘members of the church’. Did Calvin mean ‘members of the [visible] church’ or ‘members of the [biblical]

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practical question. Why, on this argument, did Peter not tell the Gentiles that their children were included in the promise? You see, reader, accepting for a moment the infant baptiser's argument, the Gentiles would not have realised that their children were included along with the parents – it was a Jewish concept, in their genes under the old covenant, leaving the Gentiles in ignorance of it, 'afar off'. According to Calvin, Peter told the Jews that *their* children were included – Jews, those who were supposed to know all about it – but he omitted to tell the unfortunate Gentiles – Gentiles, the very people who needed to be told, since they didn't have a clue about it! Furthermore, if Calvin was right, the Gentiles could easily have thought their children were not included, since the promise, according to Calvin, was made to the Jews and their offspring, leaving the children of Gentiles high and dry! What makes this even more surprising is, on the basis of the doctrine of infant baptism, all the children of all believers are supposed to be in the covenant. Or is it only the children of Jews who are included? Is the promise made to the Jews because they are Jews? And if the children of believing Gentiles are not included, why do infant baptisers baptise those children today? The truth of the matter is, age and birth are of no consequence; all men, all women and all children – of whatever nationality and age – are included, if they are among the number whom the Lord our God shall call.

What is more, are we to believe that those present, who heard Peter preach, and who repented and believed, but did not have their children (or wife, husband or servant – see Argument 7, 'Household Baptism') with them, went home (or wherever), routed them out, took them back to the apostles, and had them all baptised? Is there the slightest suggestion of this in Acts 2? And what about the resistance put up by some of those so fetched? After all, in such a huge number, it is unthinkable that none of those gathered by the believers would not put up a struggle. Do we get any hint of the scuffles which must have ensued?

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church'? If the latter, then it takes us back to the point made earlier; namely, all such children are saved, since 'Christ... loved the church and gave himself for her', and will bring all its members to absolute perfection (Eph. 5:25-27). Note also, once again, the infant baptiser's confusion. Are infants baptised to make them church members or because they are?

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And when it is all boiled down, church membership is not even in view in Acts 2:38, so how can it be a proof text for church membership? It only arises in Acts 2:41 and on, after the demonstration of faith and repentance, followed by baptism on the part of those who have been called by God's grace. If infant baptisers would restrict church membership to all who have been called and, following faith and repentance, been baptised in obedience to Christ – and to no one else – there would be no need for this discussion. As the infant baptiser Legg quite properly put it: 'The idea of members in the New Testament, that is in the picture of the body of Christ, certainly involves living, spiritual union with Christ and this would militate against saying that the children were members'. When defining church membership, the Savoy Declaration wisely omitted 'and of their children' from their version of the Westminster Confession, but even so the Independents and Congregationalists still wanted their children included in the 'covenant status' in some way. They do to this day. Trying desperately to get round the difficulty, Legg said that 'the church consists of believers with their children'.<sup>23</sup> Reader, did you spot it? To be a Reformed infant-baptiser, one certainly needs to be master of the nuances of the English language; one has to be able to read and digest the small print! 'Believers *and* their children' is it; or 'believers *with* their children'? To the man or woman in the pew, what is the difference? It appears to be a distinction without a difference.

Ezekiel 16:20-21, Romans 11:16, Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 17:7 complete the texts the Westminster Confession produces to 'prove' that churches should be composed of professors and their children. These verses have nothing at all to say upon the subject.<sup>24</sup> Nothing at all! Romans 11:16 gives a principle, namely that if a sample has certain characteristics then the whole batch has the same characteristics; 'if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches'. But it has nothing to say about church membership. Nothing! Since infant baptisers quote this verse to support their claim, I presume they understand it to mean that if a parent is a church member, so is his child. Really? Therefore, if a man

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<sup>23</sup> Legg p13.

<sup>24</sup> In any case, how can *Old* Testament verses be *proof*-texts for the practice of church membership? It is the continuity/discontinuity question again. See above.

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is a Christian, his child is, too? If a man is holy, so is his child? The argument is ludicrous.

The blunt fact is the New Testament never speaks of visible churches. It does speak of churches which are found in particular localities – Corinth, Ephesus, and so on. Hence the proper term is *local* churches, not visible churches. Naturally the invented concept of a visible church, where the members are professors and their children, is very acceptable – indeed, it is essential – to infant baptisers, who have to live with the consequences of their mistaken practice. The New Testament churches, however, were composed only of believers who were baptised after profession of faith, and who lived consistently with that profession.

This is the nub of the matter for my purpose in this book. As I said at the start, I have not been interested in an arid study of the assertions for and against infant baptism. I am convinced that infant baptisers are wrong; I think their statements are often dangerous and grossly misleading; I think their arguments are tortuous and complicated, often worked out from a false premise. I also think that, at times, they say highly speculative things about those who die in infancy, and do so with unjustified definiteness. Some of them say things which verge on the maudlin. What is more they have sometimes used highly offensive words about the attitude of Baptists towards these particular infants. On occasion they have used untrue words. What of Engelsma's criticism, for example? I have already referred to his calling the denial of infant baptism a 'grim teaching and practice'. His own full statement makes 'grim' enough reading in its own right:

Among other implications of this grim teaching and practice is that there is no ground for any hope of the election and salvation of the children of believers who die in infancy or in early childhood. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that they perish. They are, according to the Baptists themselves, outside the church and covenant of God; and outside the church and covenant of God [there] is no salvation.<sup>25</sup>

Engelsma's leap of logic is utterly unwarranted and false. What is more, it is offensive. I will repeat what I have said about *all* infants who die very young – *all* infants, not just the infants of believers:

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<sup>25</sup> Engelsma p11.



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‘Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?’ (Gen. 18:25).<sup>26</sup> Let us draw a veil over what we do not know, and let us trust in God who is ‘abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression’ (Num. 14:18). What God in his sovereign, merciful purposes chooses to do is his own prerogative. Nevertheless, what must govern our practice in the church is not his secret will but his revealed will (Deut. 29:29). Not a few infant baptisers (and some Calvinistic Baptists<sup>27</sup> including, notably, Spurgeon) have been (and are) far too fond of speculating in this very delicate area of infant death. They speak with a glowing confidence and absolute assurance, but they have no scriptural warrant for their over-free statements. They become philosophers and not theologians at this point. It is wrong of them. They should not dogmatise when Scripture is silent. Nor should they belabour those Baptists – those who are not willing to venture where Scripture does not lead – with harsh words in a very sensitive area.<sup>28</sup>

Other criticisms levelled against Baptists by infant baptisers are to the effect that the advance of Baptist teaching has been linked to the growth of Dispensationalism, Arminianism and Modernism. It is freely

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<sup>26</sup> See my earlier note on this verse.

<sup>27</sup> Not excluding Gospel Standard Strict Baptists. See, for instance, Gadsby pp30-31; *Christian’s Monthly Record* 1886 p73.

<sup>28</sup> I am not responding in kind, but simply pointing out what strikes me as the logical conclusion of Engelsma’s argument. If every believer’s child who dies is guaranteed salvation, is it not preferable for them all to die before they reach the age when they might (and some do!) ‘refuse the covenant’, turn their back upon Christ, and so perish? This, of course, is nonsense! I am reminded of the parallel wrong-headed argument that the heathen are automatically saved since they have not heard the gospel. If this is true, then we do the heathen the greatest possible disservice by taking the gospel to them!

There is another point. As for the charge of ‘grimness’, what about the death of the babies of unbelievers, or the babies of Baptists? Speaking for myself, I would apply my line of reasoning to *all* dying infants. But what do those infant baptisers, who take the stance I am criticising, do? Do they agree with Watson’s view of those who do not baptise their babies? ‘By denying their infants baptism, they exclude them from membership in the visible church, so that their infants are sucking pagans’ (Watson Vol.2 p162). We know the Puritans thought their (baptised) infants took in divinity with their mother’s milk – so, presumably, they thought of them as ‘sucking Christians’. I can see only one logical outcome of this. If a ‘sucking Christian’ dies, he goes to heaven; if a ‘sucking pagan’ dies, he goes to hell. This is ‘grim’ indeed.

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granted that the Anabaptists in general, and John Smyth in particular, were Arminians, but it is not essential to be an Arminian to practise believer's baptism. After all, the Particular Baptists arose in the 1630s. Surely Calvinistic Baptists today ought not to be put in the same box as Dispensationalists and all the rest? It is done, however. And it is grossly unfair.

*But none of that is my main concern at this time.* I deliberately turn away from it. This present publication arises from my book written about the battle to recover the pattern and order and life of the New Testament churches. And it is at this very point that infant baptism is such a disaster. It is the down-to-earth outworking of the practice of infant baptism as it affects day-to-day church life which is my main concern.<sup>29</sup>

I have supplied very many examples to show that infant baptisers regard their children – because they are their children and therefore in the covenant – as regenerate, as sanctified in Christ, as being the covenant children of God, as having God as their God, as having received the forgiveness of their sins through the blood of Christ, as being heirs of the kingdom of God, and so on. They tell them they are. They treat them accordingly. They make them church members on that basis.<sup>30</sup> Now all this poses a very real, a vital, a practical question. It is

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<sup>29</sup> It is a fact – which I find very interesting, highly significant – that in the book edited by John H. Armstrong, giving four different views of baptism, the only author of the four who did *not* conclude with a drawing-back from a full-blown application of baptism to church life, was Nettles – who rightly spoke of baptism as a symbol. Nettles saw no need to water down baptism in church life. The advocates of the other views (Reformed, Lutheran and the Churches of Christ) did. In particular, notice Pratt's acknowledgement that several Reformed congregations, while they *encourage* parents to present their babies for baptism, now *require* it only of church officers. As Nettles noted: 'If infant baptism is as important' as has been made out, 'how could a [church] not require it of their membership? Do they have a right to change God's ordinance?... Does this [practice] indicate a deep-seated discomfort as to whether infant baptism can actually be defended as biblical?' While John H. Armstrong observed that 'the contributors to [his] book all seek to keep [the] vital connection [between baptism and church life] in mind', with the exception of Nettles (with believer's baptism), in Armstrong's book, at least, they all signally failed. See John H. Armstrong pp20,72,76,105-109,141-143.

<sup>30</sup> Or else the other way about. They can't seem to make up their mind.

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a very simple question. It demands a straight answer. Are those statements true, or are they false? That is the question. They must be one or the other; which is it? Are all such children truly saved, or not?<sup>31</sup>

As a matter of undisputed fact, some Reformed infant-baptisers have actually asserted that it is so, that all their children are undoubtedly saved. Joseph C. Holbrook, for instance, declared that it was ‘incredible and impossible’ that God should not save all the children of believers according to his promise. No wonder Holbrook said it was ‘the most “exceeding great and precious promise” that I know of’. I admit that this is not the commonly held view among Reformed infant-baptisers – Hanko, for example, declared that ‘this kind of argument does more harm for the [infant baptism] position than a good argument against it’.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, if Holbrook’s blanket assertions are rejected by most infant baptisers – and they ought to be – what, exactly, *is* the status of the baptised children of believers? Are the statements which I have quoted true or false? Do infant baptisers believe them, or do they not?

The vast majority of infant baptisers are prepared to admit that not all their children will be saved. Engelsma, for instance, said that it is an ‘incontestable fact that not all the children of believers are saved...

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<sup>31</sup> See end note on p269 for excursus: ‘The Reformed and the status of children after baptism’.

<sup>32</sup> Hanko: *We* p49. But Holbrook was not alone. Wilkins: ‘What we do not know is whether or not [an unbaptised] man is in covenant with God. If he is not in covenant, he must repent of his sins and believe in Christ Jesus, be joined to the people of God by baptism, and persevere in faithfulness all his days (by the power of the Holy Spirit who works in him to “will and do” for God’s good pleasure). If he has been baptised, he *is* in covenant with God, and is obligated to walk in faithfulness’ (Wilkins: ‘Covenant’ pp66-67, emphasis mine). In other words, if he has been baptised as an infant, he has no need to repent and believe, no need of a personal saving experience of Christ. It is obvious how this drastically alters – ruins – the way such people are addressed by preachers who believe such teaching. Far worse, think of the way it affects the eternal state of those concerned. This awful consideration does not seem to stop some infant baptisers. Lusk, for instance, had no time for parents who thought of their children ‘instead of “growing up Christian” under continual covenant nurture... expected [them] to undergo their own “conversion experience” at the appropriate age’ (Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ pp74-75).

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We cannot presume that all our children are regenerate and elect. To presume this is contrary to Scripture and experience'.<sup>33</sup> Quite right! So why do they presume it? Why do they tell them they are heirs of the kingdom of God, and so on? Why did Hanks write that 'the elect children of the covenant are... as a general rule, regenerated and brought to conversion in earliest infancy. The children of the church are covenant children, themselves already regenerated'? Why did he say that the children of believers are 'children of God, God's own elect people... regenerated by the Spirit of Christ'?<sup>34</sup> What did he mean by it? What scriptural grounds did he have for saying these things?

The point I am making is this: When it comes to the theoretical view of children, most infant baptisers claim a very exalted status for their children. They could hardly use more inflated language. They declare that all their children are incorporated into Christ by baptism, they say they are in the covenant, and all the rest of it. They teach their children that it is so. They look upon their children as Christians; they address them as such. They deride Baptists and others who do not view their children as Christians, but treat them as unconverted sinners. Engelsma, for instance, attacked Jonathan Edwards (an infant baptiser himself!) for calling the children of believers, 'Satan's little vipers' – in company with all children, all being born ruined in Adam. Engelsma denounced this view by saying that the children of believers are the children of God, the lambs of the flock of Christ.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Engelsma pp11-12. What do those infant baptisers who hold to 'presumptive regeneration' make of this? See above.

<sup>34</sup> Hanks: *Ought* p22; *We* pp55-56.

<sup>35</sup> Engelsma p9. Lusk, speaking of 'the decline of infant baptism' in 19th century America, quoted Lewis Bevens Schenck: 'Uncertainty in regard to the status of children in the Church, was doubtless one great cause of inattention to the ordinance... The question arose in many minds, to what purpose is baptism administered to children? Why bring children to an ordinance in the Church, of which the Church herself makes nothing when it is over?... If the Church had no assurance that the infant children of believers were truly the children of God, if it did not treat them as Christians under her special love and watchfulness, if it ignored practically their baptism, this was reason for the decline of the ordinance' (Lusk: 'Paedobaptism' pp119-120). For the history of this battle in the context of sacramentalism as it developed in 19th century America, including leading protagonists John Williamson Nevin, Philip Schaff, Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell, see Lusk:

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E.M.B.Green asserted that in a home where there are believing parents, it is not ‘necessary or fitting’ to evangelise the children. They must be ‘treated as being in the Christian fellowship’ – Christians, church members, I suppose he meant – ‘unless they contract out... And even then they do not need to be converted... rather they need to be corrected by their parents and brought back to the Christian way from which they had strayed’.<sup>36</sup>

This statement is shocking. It is the sort of stance which is taken by many infant baptisers – *in theory*. But what of the practical outworking of that stance? Ah! When it comes to facing up to reality, how the tune changes! To hark back to an earlier figure; how the inflated language is punctured! Listen to Engelsma again: ‘Strictly from the point of view of their natural condition’, the children of believers are not ‘in any better position than the heathens of the world. Our children are by nature dead in sin’. This is simply a flat contradiction of other statements which he made. On the one hand – the theoretical point of view – the children are not ruined in the fall. On the other hand – the practical – they are. Which is it? On the one hand, Engelsma said: ‘We do not view them as unsaved heathens (“little vipers”)... but we view them as children of God’; on the other hand, they are dead in sin.<sup>37</sup>

Which is it? Are they the children of God, or are they not?

The solution which Engelsma supplied for this conundrum was to say that the position of children in the covenant is *conditional*; that when declarations are made to the effect that the children are sanctified

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‘Paedobaptism’ pp71-88; McNeill pp398-401. Schaff’s hope for reunion with Rome, and ‘Nevin’s weighty book: *The Mystical Presence*’, with its ‘high sacramental doctrine’, were potent ingredients in the ‘Mercersburg theology’ and its challenge to American Calvinism. As can be seen by the above, Nevin’s work has not been forgotten! Sacramentalism is on the march!

<sup>36</sup> Kingdon pp99-100. Bushnell argued that the child is ‘to grow up a Christian and never know himself as being otherwise’ (McNeill p400). See above for an extract from Leach p31 on the same theme. And some words from Wright, already quoted: ‘The children of the faithful... we are right to treat them as new members of God’s people, not as no better than little pagans or unbelievers’ (Wright: ‘Children’ p37).

<sup>37</sup> Engelsma pp13,16-18.

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in Christ, everybody has to understand that this means only ‘the elect children’. ‘*Conditional*’?<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Engelsma pp14-18. Is the promise, the covenant, conditional or not? Are the children in the covenant or not? Engelsma really admitted that this kind of talk is, in the end, virtually meaningless. He could say ‘that *all* children of believers are in the covenant by *conditional* promise’, yet immediately limit this to ‘the elect children’, nevertheless going on to say ‘this covenant view is in harmony with the Reformed Confessions. The Westminster Confession [for instance] holds the promise of the covenant of grace to be particular and *unconditional*’ (Engelsma pp16-17, emphasis mine). In other words, when it boils down, infant baptisers baptise all their children, assuring them all that they are in the covenant, when all the time they know that for some of them, their words are empty. And what now of his earlier statement: ‘The children of believers are included in the covenant *as children*, that is, already at conception and birth. They receive forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus, the Holy Spirit of sanctification, and church membership – as children... For they have God as their God, and are his people – as children’ (Engelsma p9, emphasis his)? This conditional/unconditional double-speak smacks of Humpty Dumpty who, it will be remembered, told Alice: ‘When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean; neither more nor less’. The church, however, drawing its principles from Scripture, has to exist in the real world, not in that fantasy-land which is entered only by passing ‘through the looking glass’. For more on the misuse of ‘conditional’, see my *Particular*.

Consider Jonathan D. Moore on Davenant: ‘In keeping with his belief in baptismal regeneration, Davenant taught that all baptised infants, without exception, are, by “the goodwill of God”, “absolved from the guilt of original sin”, and also justified, regenerated and adopted into God’s family. However, their justification, regeneration and adoption “is not exactly the same” as that of adult believers, as it can be lost. “The justification, regeneration and adoption of baptised infants, brings them into a state of salvation as far as they are capable”, but nevertheless, “the Christian infant who is regenerated in baptism acquires another regeneration when, as an adult, he believes the gospel”. Although God is “embracing them with his favour”, baptised children “do not continue justified, regenerated or adopted as adults, unless by repentance, faith, and the renunciation promised, they fulfil their vow taken upon them [by others] at baptism”’. Of course, I can hear the response: ‘We don’t believe that nonsense!’ Quite. But what – precisely – *do* modern-day Reformed people believe about the state of their baptised infants? Let us have it out in the open. As Moore went on to point out: ‘At the synod of Dort, Samuel Ward, who also held similar controversial views on baptismal regeneration... was counselled by Davenant to keep them quiet so as not to give the Arminians a foothold’ (Moore p195).

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This is a fatal flaw in the Reformed infant-baptiser's logic. In 1 Corinthians 7:14 – the verse on which so much of the thesis depends<sup>39</sup> – it does not say 'the elect children' are sanctified. Nor does it mean it. The verse teaches that *all* the children of believers are sanctified, whether or not they themselves are elect. That is the point of the verse! The children are sanctified, not because they are elect, but because the parent is a believer. I remind you, it is the meaning of the word 'sanctified' which is crucial.<sup>40</sup> If only Reformed infant-baptisers would pay proper attention to that. God's election is not an escape route in 1 Corinthians 7:14. It is not an escape route at all. It is one of the glorious doctrines of the gospel. It is an abuse to treat the doctrine of election in that cavalier fashion. The election of the child is simply not in the verse – not directly, nor by implication.<sup>41</sup>

It is utterly wrong for infant baptisers to adjust God's declarations to fit in with their interpretation. In theory, infant baptism looks attractive to many. This, I remind you, reader, is why I am writing. I am trying to issue a warning. When they have to face the inevitable, the practical outcome of their system, at that crucial point infant baptisers have to adjust their position. The problem for them is, there are those who are said to be incorporated into Christ by sprinkling, but who later prove they are utterly devoid of saving grace. At that point, some, perhaps nearly all, infant baptisers fall back on to God's election

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<sup>39</sup> See end note on p270 for excursus: 'Reformed contradictions on 1 Cor. 7:14'.

<sup>40</sup> Please see above for my comments on the verse.

<sup>41</sup> The same point can be made about household baptism. As I have shown, infant baptisers say the children of a man converted to Christ are to be baptised; the practice of the New Testament demands it. So they say. Very well. Do infant baptisers believe Acts 16:31-34 or not? Here is the command and the promise: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household'. Here is the obedience: 'Immediately he and all his family were baptised'. Infant baptisers argue for the obedience. Do they believe the promise? Or is it *conditional?* is it *presumptive?* I fail to detect such qualifying adjectives in the apostle's words: 'You will be saved, you and your household', is what he said. He issued the command and the promise and got the obedience, to and from all of the family, *on the same basis*. If infant baptisers really do think the apostle baptised the children on the basis of their father's (or mother's) faith, why do they not do the same – *and tell them they are saved – on that same basis?* And stick with it!

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as an escape clause. And in doing that, they have thrown out of the window all their swelling claims for their children. They may deride Baptists and others for their approach to children, but when it comes to it, the children of infant baptisers are ruined in the fall as much as any children. They will be saved, if they are saved, like all who are saved – including the children of Baptists! – they will be saved because God the Father elected them, Christ died for them, and the Holy Spirit works in them.

Reader, this is our only hope. Men ought not to treat God's electing decree as a loop-hole, bringing it in at the end of their case in order to evade all the disasters they have produced. What is more, God's election is our *hope*, for us and our children; it is not a *hindrance*. God's election produces salvation; it does not stand in the way of it! Election produces saved sinners; it does not produce damned sinners.<sup>42</sup> We are to look upon God's gracious decree to save sinners as something to rejoice in, not something to dread. God hated Esau, it is true, yet he loved Jacob (Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13). But which half of the text is the more amazing, the more wonderful? Which do you emphasise? The fact that God hated Esau is not as amazing as that he loved Jacob! Esau was not kept out – Jacob was brought in – by God's election. Some infant baptisers give the impression that they look upon God's electing decree as a barrier to their children being saved. From birth, they themselves treat them as saints, they bring them up in that way, they tell them they are Christians – and then they tell them, after all is said and done, it is God who, with his decrees, keeps some of them out! Their parents and elders said they were Christians; God said they were not! I dare say I shall be accused of a caricature – but that is the way I am forced to read their words.

Speaking for myself, God's election is my only hope in this matter. My children were born ruined in Adam and under the curse of God, as all children are. My wife and I dared not tell them they were Christians, nor treat them as if they were. Our only hope was that God in time would show that in eternity he had chosen them to salvation, if indeed he had, by calling them to repentance and faith.<sup>43</sup> Whatever the

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<sup>42</sup> See my earlier note on Rom. 9:21.

<sup>43</sup> See earlier extracts from Wilkins and Lusk. I repeat the latter. Lusk had no time for parents who thought of their children 'instead of "growing up Christian" under continual covenant nurture... expected [them] to undergo



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claims of infant baptisers, that is the reality. Sinners are saved only through faith, only by being redeemed by the blood of Christ, only and entirely because God elected them to salvation. Not because they were born to believing parents!

In stark contrast to the notions of infant baptisers when they come to the reality of dealing with their children, listen to some more words of Spurgeon, found in his sermon entitled ‘Jesus and the Children’, another sermon on Mark 10:13-16. Oh! that infant baptisers would heed them. Oh! that all my readers would. Spurgeon addressed himself to the ignorance of the apostles concerning the children’s need, when the mothers brought their children to Christ: ‘But these little ones with bright eyes, and prattling tongues, and leaping limbs, why should they come to Jesus? Ah, friends! they [the apostles] forgot that in those children, with all their joy, their health, and their apparent innocence, there was a great and grievous need for the blessing of a Saviour’s grace’. Spurgeon went straight on to apply this point to his hearers, saying:

If you indulge in the novel idea that *your* children do not need conversion, that children born of Christian parents are somewhat superior to others, and have good within them which only needs development, one great motive for your devout earnestness will be gone. Believe me, brethren, your children need the Spirit of God to give them new hearts and right spirits, or else they will go astray as other children do. Remember that however young they are, there is a stone within the youngest breast; and that stone must be taken away, or be the ruin of the child. There is a tendency to evil even where as yet it has not developed into act, and that tendency needs to be overcome by the divine power of the Holy Spirit, causing the child to be born again. Oh that the church of God would cast off the old Jewish idea which still has such force around us, namely, that natural birth brings with it covenant privileges! Now, even under the Old dispensation, there were hints that the true seed was not born after the flesh, but after the spirit, as in the case of Ishmael and Isaac, and Esau and Jacob. Will not even the church of God know that ‘that which is born of

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their own “conversion experience” at the appropriate age’ (Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ pp74-75). Speaking for myself, I plead ‘guilty’, and unashamedly so. If I may speak for my children, I am sure they are glad my wife and I did not treat them as believers before they professed faith, but were looking for and praying for their ‘conversion experience’. At least, that is how they are dealing with their own children.

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flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit?' 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?' The natural birth communicates nature's filthiness, but it cannot convey grace. Under the new covenant we are expressly told that the sons of God are 'born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God'. Under the old covenant, which was typical, the birth according to the flesh yielded privilege; but to come at all under the covenant of grace you must be born again. The first birth brings you nothing but an inheritance with the first Adam; you must be born again to come under the headship of the second Adam.

But it is written, says one, 'that the promise is to you, and to your children'. Dear friends, there never was a grosser piece of knavery committed under heaven than the quotation of that text as it is usually quoted. I have heard it quoted many times to prove a doctrine which is very far removed from that which it clearly teaches. If you take one half of any sentence which any man utters, and leave out the rest, you may make him say the opposite of what he means. What do you think that text really is? See Acts 2:39: 'The promise is unto you, and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call'. This grandly wide statement is the argument on which is founded the exhortation, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you'. It is not a declaration of privilege special to anyone, but a presentation of grace as much to all that are afar off as to them and their children. There is not a word in the New Testament to show that the benefits of divine grace are in any degree transmitted by natural descent: they come 'to as many as the Lord our God shall call', whether their parents are saints or sinners. How can people have the impudence to tear off half a text to make it teach what is not true? No, brethren; you must look sorrowfully upon your children as born in sin, and shapen in iniquity, 'heirs of wrath, even as others'; and though you may yourself belong to the line of saints, and trace your pedigree from minister to minister, all eminent in the church of God, yet your children occupy precisely the same position by their birth as other people's children do; so that they must be redeemed from under the curse of the law by the precious blood of Jesus, and they must receive a new [heart] by the work of the Holy Ghost. They are favoured by being placed under godly training, and under the hearing of the gospel; but their need and their sinfulness are the same as in the rest of the race. If you think of this, you will see the reason why they should be brought to Jesus Christ – a reason why they should be brought as speedily as possible in the arms of your prayer and faith to him who is able to renew them.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.32 pp569-570.

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As Spurgeon entitled another sermon already quoted, ‘Children (must be) brought to Christ, not the Font’.

Just over a year later than ‘Jesus and the Children’, Spurgeon preached a sermon entitled ‘The Blood of Sprinkling and the Children’, in which he spoke of the need to instruct children in the great themes of the gospel by arousing their curiosity, by taking them to witness the carrying out of Christ’s ordinances. Spurgeon said that we must get our children to:

Know and trust in the finished sacrifice... This will necessitate your teaching the child his need of a Saviour. You must not hold back from this needful task. Do not flatter the child with delusive rubbish about his nature being good and needing to be developed. Tell him he must be born again. Don’t bolster him up with the fancy of his own innocence, but show him his sin. Mention the childish sins to which he is prone, and pray the Holy Spirit to work conviction in his heart and conscience. Deal with the young in much the same way as you would with the old. Be thorough and honest with them. Flimsy religion is neither good for young nor old. These boys and girls need pardon through the precious blood as surely as any of us. Do not hesitate to tell the child his ruin; he will not else desire the remedy. Tell him also of the punishment of his sin, and warn him of its terror. Be tender, but be true. Do not hide from the youthful sinner the truth, however terrible it may be. Now that he has come to years of responsibility, if he believes not in Christ, it will go ill with him at the last great day. Set before him the judgement-seat, and remind him that he will have to give an account of the things done in the body. Labour to arouse the conscience; and pray God the Holy Spirit to work by you till the heart becomes tender and the mind perceives the need of the great salvation.

Children need to learn the doctrine of the cross that they may find immediate salvation... The most fundamental truth should be made most prominent; and what is this but the cross? Some talk to children about being good boys and girls, and so on; that is to say, they preach the law to the children, though they would preach the gospel to grown-up people! Is this honest? Is this wise? Children need the gospel, the whole gospel, the unadulterated gospel.<sup>45</sup>

Reader, all children need all of that – all children, including the children of believers. I put it to you, that you have been presented with two very distinct ways of dealing with children. One way is that used by infant baptisers; the other is that used by those who reject infant

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<sup>45</sup> Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.33 pp587-588.

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baptism. They cannot both be right. One of the two is clearly wrong; the other is clearly scriptural. Which is which?

Reader, the subject is so important, I trespass on your patience for just one more quotation from Spurgeon. I also point out that, contrary to the opinions of some infant baptisers, many of us who reject their practice still have strong views on the spiritual state of children and their upbringing. Such matters are not the monopoly of those who talk of ‘covenant children’. I quote from Spurgeon’s sermon ‘A Promise For Us and For Our Children’ preached from Isaiah 44:1-5 during the year 1864. Having, in the first place, addressed the parents, he went on to say:

Here comes a blessed promise for our children – ‘I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed’, in which observe first of all, the need. Our children want the Spirit of God. They are not like children educated in the street, the tavern, or the low theatre; they have not heard from our lips words of lust or profanity; they have been hushed to sleep by the name of Jesus as their lullaby; they breathe the air of religion, but for all that they need the Spirit of God. We love to see the children of godly parents brought into church membership, but we would avoid above all things anything like hereditary profession or inherited religion; it must be personal in each individual or it is not worth a groat... We must not adulterate our membership by the reception of the children of godly parents, unless we have clear proof that they themselves are converted to God. Your children need the Holy Spirit quite as much as the offspring of the Hottentot or the Kaffir. They are born in sin and shapen in iniquity: in sin do the best of mothers conceive their children, and, however well you may train them, you cannot take the stone out of the heart nor turn it into flesh. To give a new heart and a right spirit is the work of the Holy Spirit, and of the Holy Spirit alone...

It was the work of the Spirit which transformed their fathers – it is that which must transform them. The Word may come to them and not be blessed; we may be silly enough to take them to baby-baptism and they would not be blessed... I do not know that the parent needs to say much to his child about baptism... except, sometimes, a gentle word as to the duty of the believer, and a clear explanation of the meaning... Tell the child that he is dead in trespasses and sins, let there be no doubt about his natural condition... I think that in some Sunday School addresses there is not always the gospel so clearly and decidedly proclaimed as it should be. It is not very easy, I know, to preach Christ to little children, but there is nothing else worth preaching. To stand up and say, ‘Be good boys and girls, and you will get to heaven’, is preaching the old covenant of works, and it is no more right to preach salvation by works to little children than

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to those who are of a mature age. We are all dead, and as the Spirit of God can alone renew us, so he alone can renew them.<sup>46</sup>

I leave the matter there. But have you noticed that when children are addressed by preachers,<sup>47</sup> they are frequently asked if they *love* Jesus? Do please remember that a sinner is justified by faith, and not by love. However young or old the sinner is, saving faith is essential (Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8). Little acts of kindness do not justify, at whatever age they are done (Eph. 2:8-9). The point is, the children of saints have exactly the same need of justifying faith as the children of pagans, whatever some infant baptisers may say to the contrary.

The problem is getting worse. In recent days, I have noticed a growing trend in some evangelical churches which do not baptise infants; namely, in their children's 'talks', to address the children as 'Christians', to call them 'Christians', and to pray for help for them in 'their Christian lives'.<sup>48</sup> What are we coming to?<sup>49</sup>

So, to return to my earlier question to infant baptisers: Are all the children of believers in the covenant, or not? It is all very well making enormous theoretical claims for the children – what of the practical outcome? The fact remains that infant baptisers produce men and women who have been told they are Christians when they are not. That is the issue which must be faced.

Interestingly, Marcel solved the conundrum – of why some 'covenant children' are not converted – by taking a totally different escape route to Engelsma who, it will be recalled, hid behind God's election. Indeed, what Marcel alleged flatly contradicted Engelsma's suggested solution. Marcel said that not all 'the children of believers [will be blessed]... with saving faith. A certain number of them will voluntarily choose unbelief or rebellion despite the work of God in

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<sup>46</sup> Spurgeon: 'A Promise' pp212-213.

<sup>47</sup> In children's talks – how few address them at all during the sermon.

<sup>48</sup> If the parents (and the church), who do *not* baptise babies, nevertheless are *dogmatic* that their infants 'under the age of responsibility' are saved, and treat them as 'little Christians' as they are growing up, and submit them to 'children's talks' where they are addressed as believers – even if they do not allow them to partake of the Lord's supper, which a growing number are now doing (see below) – is it any wonder if these infants, when they become adults, think themselves true believers – even if they are not?

<sup>49</sup> See end note on p271 for excursus: 'Reformed inclusivism gone mad'.

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their hearts by the Holy Spirit'.<sup>50</sup> In other words, Marcel declared that the promise of the covenant said one thing according to infant baptisers, but in the course of time some growing children will say the opposite, when they will resist the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. This is an amazing statement. It is breathtaking! Marcel went further than the Arminians. At least they only go as far as to say that sinners can resist the external call of the gospel, whereas Marcel was prepared to state that sinners can resist the internal working of the Spirit in the heart.

The fact remains, however they explain it, infant baptisers inevitably produce at least some young people and adults who are unregenerate, but who have been assured they are Christians. There is no getting round this unpalatable truth. Apparently we are to believe that these unfortunate people get into this horrific condition either by God's electing decree, or by their own choice in that their rebellion successfully resists the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Which is it – God's choice, or theirs? How many infant baptisers agree with Charles Hodge who said that 'little ones have their names written in the Lamb's book of life [by baptism], even if they afterwards choose to erase them'?<sup>51</sup>

But the stubborn question remains – it will not go away.<sup>52</sup> Whatever the reason for it, infant baptisers produce some unregenerate sinners who are told they are Christians. What will they do with them? Do any of them concur with the highly influential Puritan, John Cotton? He tackled this question of church members who have no

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<sup>50</sup> Hako: *We* p73.

<sup>51</sup> Kingdon p65.

<sup>52</sup> 'What, then, is the position of our children? Are the children of believers within the covenant of grace, but nevertheless to be regarded as the children of wrath until they give clear evidence of being savingly converted? Or are they within the covenant, and presumptively elect or regenerate until they give clear evidence to the contrary? Or are they outside the covenant altogether, and standing desperately in need of regeneration? Or, if they are elect and within the covenant, has it anything to do with the fact that they are children of believers? Or, to widen the question, what is the ground of covenant interest?' (Boorman pp98-99). I have set out my answer to these questions – clearly enough, I hope. But how do infant baptisers answer them? Answer them, they must! See Buchanan: 'David Wright' pp151-152; Buchanan and Vasey p23.

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grace in them. Some left the church, thereby proving they were not true members, he said. But he had to face up to the certainty that ‘there are some who continue faithful friends to the church, and never fall off’. Although they ‘have no truth of grace in them’, nevertheless they remain church members – what of *them*? Cotton was prepared to assert that ‘they have the place of members, but they are not true members’, and he was willing to keep them. To make his reasoning clear(!), he gave an illustration. He likened the church to a man with a glass eye or a wooden leg. Unconverted church members play the part of that glass eye or wooden leg, Cotton maintained! ‘So such may be ornaments and supports of the church, but yet not true members’, he declared.<sup>53</sup> Reader, is this not a fantasy world? Frankly, it is madness. What is more, think for a moment of the spiritual state, the spiritual danger, of those wretched unregenerate glass-eye-or-wooden-leg church members. Speaking spiritually: Allowing for a moment that they may be a benefit to the church – though I stoutly deny it – think of the curse the church has been to them! Some church ‘ornaments’ end up in hell! Who helped to send them there? Where is the Scripture for all this?

However, some have plumbed even greater depths than Cotton. In 18th century New England, Solomon Stoddard ‘and many other great divines’, no doubt because of their views on infant baptism, came to

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<sup>53</sup> Cotton p225. And how about this? On the premise ‘that one and the same covenant, which was made to Abraham in the Old Testament, is for substance the same with that in the New; and this, under the New Testament, the very same with that of Abraham’s under the Old’, Shepard wrote of what he called the double covenant – the parent’s and God’s, the external and the internal covenant, the elect and the church seed. He saw nothing wrong in all the members of a believer’s household – whether ‘visibly godly or the children of such’, the children, both ‘good and bad’ – being church members. Federal holiness covered it all, according to Shepard; the children may be unbelievers, of course, but even so be ‘federally holy’. What if these children grow up profane? They are still church members ‘until they are cast out’, but for this they must ‘positively reject the gospel’, otherwise ‘they are to be accounted of God’s church’. As I say, all was based on the covenant with Abraham. Shepard admitted such churches would be ‘mixed with many chaffy hypocrites, and often profane persons’, but he thought all is well since ‘ordinarily God gathers out his elect’ from such ‘profane and corrupt churches’. And so on, and on (Iain Murray: *Reformation* pp379-405). Shepard’s entire treatise should be read. *That*, in itself, should give infant baptisers pause for thought.

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the remarkable conclusion that ‘even excommunicated persons are still members of the church of God; and some suppose, the worshippers of Baal in Israel, even those who were bred up such from their infancy, remained still members of the church of God’. So wrote Jonathan Edwards. He even added that some held that Papists who continue to practise their idolatry and superstitions ‘still are in the visible church of Christ’.<sup>54</sup> It takes one’s breath away!

Even where men draw back at that, it is almost inevitable that infant baptisers end up with mongrel churches that have a partly regenerate and a partly unregenerate membership. They invent a variety of ways to try to cope with it, but they are left with a diabolical confusion.<sup>55</sup> It is even worse than that. Their system tends to produce – it actually does produce – some men and women who, though unregenerate, think they are children of God. And it can produce more than ‘some’ who are deluded; as I have shown, it can produce many. Now since this is so important, I want to illustrate the point further. I do so from three well-documented testimonies.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Edwards p434.

<sup>55</sup> ‘In the 16th century some of the leading Reformers went through phases of extreme frustration at trying to promote a godly faithful church on the basis of universal infant baptism. Some of them resorted, for a time, to working with small groups of true believers [who were] pledged to a committed evangelical devotion and discipline incapable of being expected from the whole population’ (Wright: *What...?* p100). The former concern, mission impossible, is still being attempted; the latter is an admission of the New Testament position. Note the hypocrisy in all this. The Reformers lambasted the Anabaptists for their views on baptism, yet secretly (and not so secretly) envied them, and wanted their discipline and spirituality. See my *Battle*. The phrase for the invented escape-route is ‘a church within a Church’.

<sup>56</sup> See also Wright: *What...?* See end note on p275 for excursus: ‘William Perkins and John Preston, and the complications and consequences of sacramentalism’.