A Study of the Special Commission on Baptism (1953-63) and developments in baptismal doctrine and practice in the Church of Scotland since 1963

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MA BD

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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January 2016

Abstract

In 1953 a Special Commission on Baptism was appointed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, under the convenorship of The Very Rev Dr Thomas F. Torrance, to carry out a fresh examination of the Doctrine of Baptism, in order to lead the Church to theological agreement and uniform practice. The Commission had emerged after years of disagreement related to the meaning of baptism and its administration, especially in light of infant baptism. What followed was seven years of Interim Reports and the production of a Biblical Doctrine of Baptism. Since then, Act XVII (1963) pertaining to Baptism has been revisited on several occasions.

It is the contention of this thesis that Torrance greatly influenced the work of the Commission and shaped substantially the doctrine that emerged. The result was an understanding of baptism that whilst rooted in the Reformed tradition, departed from it. By suggesting that *baptisma* was closely aligned to Christ's vicarious death, and that the sanctifying nature of the incarnation was the primary justification for the baptism of infants, a different trajectory was proposed. This created a tension between two differing paradigms, one that led to discriminate baptism and another, that could have led to indiscriminate baptism. The result was confusion in the General Assembly, and failure to unify doctrine and practice.

In light of this, this thesis will explore the baptismal theology of Thomas F. Torrance. It will then examine the reports of the Special Commission, the minutes of their meetings, and the verbatim minutes of the General Assembly during that period, in order to establish Torrance's influence upon the Commission and the reception of the reports within the church. Identifying that the main areas of tension lay in sacramental and covenantal theology, it will then offer an overview of both the Reformed tradition and the Special Commission to see points of agreement and disagreement, in order to assess the extent to which the Special Commission departed from Reformed principles. Finally, it will explore the influence of the Special Commission's work on the Church of Scotland since 1963, highlighting the watershed in baptismal theology that occurred in 2003, with the acknowledgement that believers' baptism, and not infant baptism, was the theological norm.

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Acknowledgements

My thanks, first and foremost, must go to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) who made the decision to proceed with this PhD financially viable and possible. Gratitude is also expressed to Prof. Werner Jeanrond (Oxford) who invited me to consider undertaking a doctorate whilst he was Chair of Divinity at Glasgow University in 2008. Whilst at times I have wondered if it was such a good idea, under his initial supervision, I enjoyed the freedom to explore a wide range of topics and benefitted greatly from his encouragement to participate in the theological seminars and conferences that proved so worthwhile. It was during this time that I chatted on a number of occasions with Dr Doug Gay (Glasgow), and it is thanks to him that my thesis focuses so heavily upon the Scottish church context, and, in particular, the work of the Special Commission on Baptism.

During Prof. Jeanrond's period of sabbatical and subsequent move to Oxford University, I appreciated the advice of Prof. David Jasper (Glasgow), and valued the many discussions and occasional coffee meetings with fellow researchers in No.1 The Square. It was at this time that Dr Charlotte Methuen (Glasgow) agreed to supervise the remainder of my PhD, and a better supervisor I could not have hoped for. I am very grateful for her wide-ranging knowledge of ecclesiastical history, her constructive criticism, her attention to detail, her willingness to be available and mark things right to the wire, and most of all for her grace and patience, which time and time again, have been tested to the limit. I cannot say thank you enough.

Thanks must also be expressed to the library staff at Glasgow and Edinburgh University who helped with my research enquiries, as well as the Presbytery Clerk's who replied to my e-mails regarding the Special Commission on Baptism. Dr John Scott for allowing me to read his thesis before it was published and for his offer of support. The staff in the Principal Clerk's Office in 121 George Street, who were very hospitable and helpful when I was reading the verbatim minutes, and the congregations of Clydebank: Abbotsford linked with Dalmuir Barclay, many of whom have enquired after my progress and have been very encouraging. Last and by no means least, thanks must go to my wonderful parents, Mary and Alan Bell, who have always been my greatest encouragers and support, my family and friends, and, of course, my lovely husband, Steven, who has been a tower of strength. My sincerest thanks to you all for believing that I would get there in the end.

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not be submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Ruth H B Morrison

Introduction

I did not set off with the intention of writing about baptism. I had begun by exploring the question of soteriology, asking not so much why have we been saved, but rather, what have we been saved for? It did not take me too long to discover that my research topic would have to be much more focussed, and so, having highlighted the theme of hope, and having always had an interest in sacramental theology, I began to read about eschatology. This included: *Surprised by Hope* by Tom Wright, *What Dare We Hope?* By Gerhard Sauter, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* by John Polkinghore, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context* by Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *The Christian Hope* by Brian Hebblethwaite, *What are we waiting for? Christian Hope and Contemporary Culture* edited by Stephen Holmes and Russell Rook, *Eschatology and Hope* by Anthony Kelly and *Eucharist and Eschatology* by Geoffrey Wainwright. What emerged was the realisation that whilst a great deal had been written about the relationship between the eschatological feast of heaven and the Lord's Supper, very little research had been undertaken in relation to the connection between baptism and eschatology. This surprised me. As my research developed, I realised that the historical elements and discussions of baptismal practice had been well researched. This conclusion was reached after reading many books, not least: *Baptism in the Early Church* by Everett Ferguson, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism* and *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism* by Bryan Spinks, *The Rites of Christian Initiation* by Maxwell Johnson, *Early Christian Baptism and Catechumenate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt* and *Early Christian Baptism and Catechumenate: West and East Syria* by Thomas Finn, and most recently, the monumental work, *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism*, edited by David Hellholm, Tor Vegge, Øyvind Norderval and Christer Hellhom. Acknowledging that a broad historical overview was not going to be fruitful, I began to consider my work as a parish minister and reckoned that questions relating to the doctrine and practice of baptism within the Church of Scotland might prove interesting.

After reading the chapter "Baptismal Theology and Practice in the Church of Scotland" by Paul Nimmo, in *Worship and Liturgy in Context* (edited by Duncan Forrester and Doug Gay), I suspected that no in depth or systematic study of the work of the Special Commission on Baptism, which met in the 1950s, had ever been undertaken. Indeed, as I began to explore the archives in Edinburgh University and the reports of the various Boards and Committee's of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, I realised

that the theological waters of baptism were extremely muddy, and an exploration of the baptismal theology of the Church of Scotland, centred on the Special Commission, might prove worthwhile. This was affirmed when I read the words of the Board of National Mission who suggested

> Taking all our evidence into account, we believe that, beyond those who regularly attend Sunday worship, there is today a deep and widespread ignorance of the meaning and purpose of Christian Baptism and that sustained teaching, consistent practice and the involvement of the whole people of God are needed to remedy this.[1]

The Special Commission on Baptism that was appointed by the General Assembly in 1953 would have agreed with the widespread ignorance about the meaning and purpose of baptism, not only outwith the church, but within. Indeed, from the late 1940s onwards, articles related to baptism appeared frequently in the *Scottish Journal of Theology,* raising questions about baptismal origins, biblical warrant, administration, efficacy, and its relationship with faith, mission, and salvation.

Some of this discussion arose in response to the publication of Oscar Cullman's, *Baptism in the New Testament,* W. F. Flemington's, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism,* Karl Barth's, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism,* G. W. H. Lampe's, *The Seal of the Spirit,* and T. W. Manson's article, *Baptism in the Church.* The last of these provoked attention from Church of Scotland minister, Ernest Payne, whose response seems to encapsulate the anxiety that lead to the establishment of the 1953 Special Commission. Manson argued that baptism was a rite of incorporation into the Church, the New Israel, the Body of Christ,[2] thus aligning himself with Reformed belief in covenantal continuity, and he challenged the "atomistic individualism" that considered that the "matter of primary importance [in baptism] is my salvation, or damnation."[3] In consequence, he argued, even if it was proved that infant baptism had not occurred in the early church, its practice was a good thing, for the most important question connected to baptism was "the relation of the individual to Christ in His Body, the Church."[4] Payne was shocked by what he perceived to be Manson's lack of attention to Scripture, his omission of any connection between baptism, penitence and faith, and his departure from apostolic from what Payne regarded as veracity. In contrast, Payne believed that a return to the New Testament model was required:

[1] Report to the General Assembly 1999 by the Board of National Mission, 20/91, 11.9.3.8.
[2] T.W. Manson, "Baptism in the Church," in *The Scottish Journal of Theology,* 2.4 (1949), 395.
[3] Ibid., 398.
[4] Ibid., 403.

> Might not a return to what is admitted to have been the general practice in apostolic times better suit the present situation of the Church in an age which must be recognised to be post-Constantinian and post-Augustinian, if not post-Christian?[5]

Whether or not the Church of Scotland recognised the breadth of the change it was witnessing, it is evident that whilst "in the period between the Reformation and the 1950s, the Church's understanding of baptism remained largely unaltered,"[6] there was a desire from many quarters, stimulated to some extent by fear[7] and anxiety, that "by free and frank discussion of the issues involved, the Christian Church may ultimately come to a common mind."[8] Such a hope may have appeared overly idealistic given the complexity of sacramental theology, and to some even questionable in its appeal.

Nevertheless, that prospect found voice initially in 1951, when an Act was passed in order to annul the 1933 Act pertaining to who had the right to be baptised. The earlier Act of Assembly, 1933, vii., had stated:

> A child has a right to Baptism (1) whose parents, one or both, having been themselves baptized, profess the Christian religion, or (2) who, being of unknown parentage or otherwise separated from its parents, is under Christian care and guardianship.[9]

Owing to a lack of agreement about what 'profess the Christian religion' actually meant[10] (did it mean "communicants in good standing," or "simply desiring the child to be baptised"),[11] a Commission was set up under the Convenorship of Dr Matthew Stewart, "recommending the repeal of the Act of 1933, and the substitution for it of a new:"

> A child has a right to Baptism: (1) whose parents, one or both, in virtue of their own Baptism, are members of the visible Church, profess the Christian faith, earnestly desire that their child may be baptized, and undertake the Christian upbringing of the child or (ii) who, being of unknown parentage or otherwise separated from its parents, or for other valid reasons, is presented by a sponsor or sponsors, themselves baptized members of the visible Church, who earnestly desire that the child may be baptized and who undertake the Christian upbringing of the child.[12]

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[5] Ernest A. Payne, "Professor T. W. Manson on Baptism," in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 3.1 (1950), 56.
[6] Paul Nimmo,"Baptismal Theology and Practice in the Church of Scotland," in Duncan B. Forrester and Doug Gay (eds), *Worship and Liturgy in Context: Studies and Case Studies in Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press Ltd 2009), 92.
[7] Ibid.,97.
[8] J. K. S. Reid, "Notes on the Administration of Holy Baptism," in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 3.2 (1950), 162.
[9] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism to the General Assembly, 1956, 607.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Bryan D. Spinks, 'Freely by His Grace: Baptismal Doctrine and the Reform of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Church of Scotland, 1953-1994,' in *Rule of Prayer, Rule of Faith: Essays in Honour of Aidan Kavanagh*, eds. Nathan Mitchell and John Baldovin (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 219.
[12] Ibid., 608.

Despite the efforts to "tighten the administration of Baptism,"[13] as a result of interpretational differences, practice was far from uniform. In 1951, following the General Assembly, an Overture from the Presbytery of Glasgow was received:

> Whereas there has been in recent years great dissatisfaction at the lack, within the Church, of uniformity as to conditions required for the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism. And whereas recent changes in the Law of the Church have failed to bring about such uniformity. And whereas the underlying reason for this lack of uniformity is a diversity of belief as to the meaning of Baptism … it is humbly overtured … that the General Assembly appoint a Special Commission to carry out a fresh examination of the Doctrine of Baptism, and, through its report to the General Assembly, and in other ways it may find desirable, to stimulate and guide such thought and study throughout the Church as may lead to theological agreement and uniform practice.[14]

In response, a Special Commission on Baptism was appointed.[15] What ensued was nine years of discussion and annual Interim Reports, a study document on the Biblical Doctrine of Baptism issued in 1958 based on the Interim Report of 1955, and a final report published in 1962.

The Special Commission's Task

From the outset, it is clear that the Commission realised that their job was going to be a difficult one, and that "prolonged Biblical and historical research was necessary if the need of the Church … were to be met."[16] As a result, the Commission held that following the Reformed model they had a four-fold task, relating to scripture, tradition, doctrine and the guidance of the Holy Spirit:

1) To examine the teaching of the Holy Scripture, and to set it forth as carefully and fully as possible in order that the doctrine and practice of the Church may have a solid Biblical foundation.
2) A thorough examination of our Scottish tradition in doctrine and practice, and of its roots in the Reformation.
3) Biblical and historical researches should then be gathered up in a constructive formulation of the doctrine of Baptism.

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism to the General Assembly, 1962, 709.
[15] The original list of members was as follows: The Revs Professor T.F. Torrance, D. Cairns, D. Baillie, I. Henderson; the Revs J. MacInnes, G.S. Gunn, J. Wilson Baird, R.S. Wallace, D.G.M Mackay, J.S. M'Ewan, D.H.S. Read, D.F.S Dick, R.S. Louden, T.D. Stewart Brown, H.C. Donaldson, G.F. Cox, William Barclay, Johnston R. M'Kay, John Heron, Ian A. Muirhead, J.A. M'Fadden, W.C.V. Smith; and James Adair Esq., J.R. Philip Esq. and G. Grant Esq. cited in Bryan D. Spinks, 'Freely by His Grace: Baptismal Doctrine and the Reform of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Church of Scotland, 1953-1994,' 219.
[16] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism to the General Assembly, 1955, 609.

4) We must further seek the help of the Holy Spirit to guide the Church in the formulation of this doctrine in language that can be readily understood, and in the application of the doctrine in the life and practice of the Church.[17]

Overview of Annual Reports

What followed in the years ahead was a systematic exploration of the practice and doctrinal developments pertaining to baptism, from John the Baptist through to 1959. 1956 dealt with the early church, the early rites, and the doctrine of baptism in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. 1957 was concerned with Baptism in the Mediaeval church and the Reformation, including an exploration of the Roman Catholic Doctrine and Anglican Church understanding. 1958 explored Baptism in the Church of Scotland until the Disruption in 1843, and made particular reference to the Westminster Confession of Faith adopted by the Church of Scotland in 1647; and 1959, focussed upon Baptism in the Church of Scotland between the disruption and included a contrasting look at Baptist teaching, compared with Reformed. The subsequent reports dealt primarily with the formulation of the Doctrine of Baptism, criticism of the Church of Scotland's Subordinate Standards, and issues arising from Presbytery discussion and feedback. From these reports, certain themes emerged that ultimately influenced the shape of the final doctrine.

Problems and Errors Identified in the Received Doctrine

From the outset, the inherited definition of a sacrament from Augustine, following an analysis of the Apostolic Church, was deemed to be "un-Biblical"; in the view of the Commission, it tended "to distort what the New Testament [had] to say about Baptism."[18] As a result, the Commission preferred to define a sacrament in terms of the 'Mystery of Christ.'[19] Its members believed that its task was to explain Baptism "in its unchanging and contemporary relevance,"[20] in light of Biblical Studies and the prevalence of references to Baptism, and in 1955 they concluded that "our traditional formulation of the doctrine of Baptism needs correction":[21]

> The Commission believes that the recovery in much fuller measure of the Biblical significance and practice of Baptism will contribute immeasurably to the whole life of the Church, in a quickened understanding of the Christian faith, in the building up of the Church as the Body of Christ, in the whole pattern of Christian living

[17] Ibid., 609-610.
[18] Ibid., 613.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 654.

> especially in the family, and in the evangelical witness and mission of the Church at home and abroad.[22]

Indeed, having highlighted the importance of Biblical studies, the historical Jesus and the Christocentric nature of Baptism, as well as rejecting the individualistic, psychological and subjective characteristics of some denominational practice (namely Roman Catholicism), and defending and affirming the normality of infant baptism; the Commission deduced that there were three main problems and tensions inherent in Baptism:

> A. The contradiction between Federal Theology and the Gospel of Grace. B. The divorce of the Atonement from the Incarnation. C. The separation of the Church Visible from the Church Invisible.[23]

In emphasising these problems, the Commission had, over its years of work, become convinced that

> The Church as a whole needs to have a deeper understanding of the doctrine of Christ and His Church, of the Atonement, and of the Lord's Supper, if a common mind on Baptism is to be firmly grounded.[24]

Taking all of this into consideration, it is the argument of this thesis, in agreement with others, that the Special Commission's Convenor, Thomas Torrance, greatly influenced the work of the Commission and shaped substantially the doctrine that emerged. The result was an understanding of baptism that whilst rooted in the Reformed tradition, departed from it. This was a consequence of Torrance's own baptismal theology and the emphasis he placed upon the One vicarious baptism of Jesus, the baptised union with Christ, which he aligned with the term *baptisma*, and his belief that sanctifying nature of the incarnation was the primary justification for the baptism of infants. This created a tension with the traditional covenantal model used to justify infant baptism, creating one justification that led to discriminate baptism and another, that could have led to indiscriminate baptism. Furthermore, whilst rejecting the *ex opere operato* understanding of baptism as a means of grace, as a result of Torrance's strong dislike of federal theology, the reports preferred to emphasize God's grace at the expense of faith. This resulted in a doctrine of baptism that reinforced the passive, objective, complete nature of the sacrament and negated the importance of an ethical outworking of baptism through response, growth and discipleship. The result was confusion in the General Assembly regarding grace and faith, and whilst they accepted the doctrine as a valid statement, it failed to be passed in law.

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[22] Ibid., 661-662.
[23] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism to the General Assembly, 1959, 632.
[24] Report of the Special Commission on Baptism to the General Assembly, 1960, 679.

Therefore, first and foremost, this thesis will explore the baptismal theology of Thomas F. Torrance, in order to discern what his understanding of baptism was. In doing so, it will examine the reports of the Special Commission, the minutes of their meetings, and the verbatim minutes of the General Assembly during that period, in order to establish Torrance's influence upon the Commission and the reception of the reports within the church. Identifying that the main areas of tension lay in sacramental and covenantal theology, it will then offer an overview of both the Reformed tradition and the Special Commission to see points of agreement and disagreement, allowing an assessment to be made as to the extent to which the Special Commission departed from Reformed principles. Finally, it will explore the influence of the Special Commission's work on the Church of Scotland since 1963, recognising ecumenical and internal movements that led to the watershed in baptismal theology that occurred in 2003, with the acknowledgement that believers' baptism, and not infant baptism, was the theological norm.

Chapter One

Thomas F. Torrance and baptismal theology

Whilst much of the baptismal theology present within the Reports of the Special Commission was not exclusive to the Church of Scotland (in many ways it was typical of Reformed doctrine and practice of the 1950s), a closer examination of the reports and the final doctrine reveals a baptismal theology that moves away from and is at variance with a typical Reformed understanding of baptism. David Wright concludes that the doctrine of baptism that was proposed by the Special Commission was one of "sophisticated elusiveness," which "sat loose to historical and contemporary baptismal realities" and "proved unequal to the demands of pastoral confusion and disorder."[1] Wright suggests that this was the consequence of the Commission's proposition that " 'baptism' refers primarily to 'the one, all inclusive, vicarious baptism of Christ for all men'."[2] As will be seen in the course of this thesis, the Biblical Doctrine of Baptism proposed by the Special Commission and sent down under the Barrier Act in 1961 was resisted by the General Assembly. Instead, the General Assembly "merely noted its [the doctrines] acceptance by a majority of Presbyteries as a valid statement of biblical and Reformed doctrine and commended it to general consideration."[3]

Several commentators have noted that the Special Commission's Convenor, the Very Rev Dr Thomas Forsyth Torrance, was responsible for the majority of the work undertaken by the Special Commission and that his understanding of baptism substantially shaped the doctrine of baptism that was produced. In this light and given the opinion, then and now, that the doctrine of baptism submitted by the Special Commission offered something new and divergent, it could be proposed that Torrance was instrumental in bringing this about. Indeed, John Scott believes that it is Torrance's "unique voice on baptism"[4] which is reflected in the reports. The uniqueness of Torrance's voice on baptism is supported by

[1] David F. Wright, *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective* (Great Britain: Paternoster, 2007), 305.
[2] Ibid.
[3] *Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1963* (Edinburgh, 1963), 462 in Wright, *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective*, 305.
[4] John Scott, 'Recovering the Meaning of Baptism in Westminster Calvinism in Critical Dialogue with Thomas F. Torrance.' PhD Thesis, The University of Edinburgh, 2015, 145.

George Hunsinger. In his assessment (here mediated through the word of Paul Molnar), Torrance's sacramental understanding

> represents a new synthesis of Calvin and Barth which improves on both and embodies "the most creative Reformed breakthrough on the sacraments in the twentieth-century theology, and arguably the most important Reformed statement since Calvin."[5]

Scott suggests that Torrance "radically changed the received thinking on the nature of the human predicament, the nature of the atonement and the association of baptism with atonement,"[6] and, that in doing so, he replaced a covenantal paradigm with an incarnational paradigm in his theology of baptism.[7] Therefore, whilst Torrance was an advocate and strong supporter of infant baptism, Scott argues that he used a "different soteriological paradigm to defend infant baptism in the Church of Scotland's Special Commission," and, in doing so, signalled "a departure from the covenantal arguments that were traditionally used to defend infant baptism."[8] By relocating baptism within the context of incarnational redemption, rather than within the context of the covenant,[9] a new soteriological understanding of baptism emerged, which Scott thinks may well have been "one of the causes of the failure of Torrance to have his defence of infant baptism accepted in the Church of Scotland."[10] In recognition of the influence which has been ascribed to him, before turning to the reports of the Special Commission in order to discern their exploration of the meaning and understanding of baptism in the Church of Scotland, this chapter will examine the understanding of baptism in the theology of Thomas F. Torrance. In doing so, it will highlight the principal features of Torrance's baptismal theology, enabling his influence to be recognised and critiqued as the annual reports of the Special Commission on Baptism are explored and the reception of them by the Church of Scotland's General Assembly assessed in subsequent chapters.

Among Torrance's prolific lectures and publications there are a number of articles and book chapters on baptism. Three in particular are important for the purposes of this thesis: *The Meaning of Baptism* (1956), *The Sacrament of Baptism* (1960) and *The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church* (1975). In his earliest writings, Torrance begins by

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[5] Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Great Britain: Ashgate 2009), 1.
[6] John Scott, 'Recovering the Meaning of Baptism in Westminster Calvinism in Critical Dialogue with Thomas F. Torrance,' 212.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 61.
[9] Ibid., 196.
[10] Ibid.

returning to the New Testament and grounds the practice of baptism solely in the person of Christ:

> In regard to Baptism, the New Testament is not interested so much in the outward rite as in what stands behind the rite; not so much in the subjective experience of the baptised as in the death and resurrection of Christ; and therefore it is not interested in the human minister but in the One into whose name we are baptised.[11]

For Torrance, the centrality of Jesus Christ was fundamental to the meaning of baptism and its soteriological significance was often to the fore. Whilst Torrance believed that the outward rites were indispensable, he maintained that the "main focus of attention is directed on the objective reality in the person of Christ and His finished work on our behalf."[12] It was not the rite itself or its performance, nor the attitude of the baptised or their confession of faith that ultimately determined the meaning of baptism, but rather, Christ alone, because, as Torrance put it, "it was not baptism that was crucified for us, nor was it faith that was crucified for us, but Jesus Christ."[13] At the same time, and in coherence with his profoundly Trinitarian theology, he was quick to point out that baptism is not solely into the name of Christ:

> Baptism in the name of the Father speaks of the prevenient love of God, and tells us that long before we learned to love and believe in Him He loved us and chose us to be His own; and Baptism in the name of the Holy Spirit speaks of the supernatural presence and work of God, telling us that our coming to love Him and our learning to believe in Him are the creative work of the Holy Spirit within us. It is only within that context of Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit that we can speak rightly of Baptism in the name of Christ.[14]

Nevertheless, Torrance maintained a Christocentric focus, which leads to two aspects of baptism that he deems to be important. First, Torrance believed that "baptism is into the name of the whole Christ,"[15] which includes not only Jesus' death, but also his birth. In fact, the latter was an event that Torrance believed had been neglected in recent years:

> Modern theology has tended to neglect the reconciling and renewing significance of the birth of Jesus – but that is, I believe, an important element that needs to be restored to the doctrine of Baptism.[16]

Against this neglect, Torrance maintained that it was through the incarnation that God's eternal love was embodied and made real, enabling reconciliation and the adoption of

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[11] Thomas F. Torrance, "The Meaning of Baptism," in *Canadian Journal of Theology* 2 (1956), 130.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 131.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

humanity as God's children.[17] Indeed, in Torrance's opinion, it was the incarnation that provided a defence for the baptism of infants, for they "shared in the birth of the human Jesus who was born an infant for them." [18] Second, Torrance emphasised the significance of Jesus' own baptism in the Jordan,[19] affirming his view that in baptism the whole work of atonement is witnessed through Christ.[20] Both these aspects were significant in Torrance's understanding of baptism because they emphasised the "one, all inclusive, vicarious baptism of Christ for all:"

> When we are baptised in the name of Christ, we are baptised into a work that has already been completed on our behalf in the whole course of Christ's obedience, for His birth to His resurrection. Baptism is not the Sacrament of what we do but of what Christ has already done and which we could not do for ourselves.[21]

In light of this Christocentric understanding of baptism, Torrance maintained that the place and significance of faith was also objective, rather than subjective, and lay "in the fact that in it man takes refuge from his own frailty and instability in the steadfast love and unswerving faithfulness of God." Thus, when it came to the importance of a response of faith in baptism, Torrance maintained:

> Only when we think of Baptism truly as the attestation not of our faith but of God's faithfulness, as the sign and seal not of something that begins with our human decisions but with the prior decision of Christ, can we give faith its full place.[22]

Torrance, therefore, did not refute the importance of an individual's response to God in faith, but emphasised that such a response was overlapped and undergirded by the divine decision on which each person is entirely dependent.[23]

Much of this was bound up with Torrance's belief that baptism is a sacrament, which, as a consequence of its soteriology nature, is finished, fulfilled and complete. Considering the meaning of baptism, he asserted:

> Baptism is the divinely given ordinance which directs us and our children not to something which only becomes real when we believe, but into the saving act of God's love which He has already fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ, and into which we enter as the great inheritance offered to us in the Gospel.[24]

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Thomas F. Torrance, *Gospel, Church, and Ministry* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications 2012), 87-88. Habets suggests that Torrance went so far as to argue "in the strongest possible terms that there is no additional act of salvation outside of what Christ has achieved in his incarnation." Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (Surrey: Ashgate 2009), 176.
[19] Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Meaning of Baptism,' 131.
[20] Ibid., 132.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid. This is congruent with Torrance's views of Revelation, which, as McGrath highlights, "forces us to think 'a posteriori rather than a priori'," *Thomas F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography,* 148.
[24] Ibid.

This leads directly into the question of whether baptism is to be understood as a sign and seal of regeneration, which Torrance addresses in the close of his essay. Here he argues that the rite of baptism in and of itself has no power to regenerate. Instead, "in Baptism our regeneration in Christ is declared, and shown forth, and promised: it is *sacramentally* enacted as an image and likeness of the birth and resurrection of Christ."[25] Once again, the Christocentric nature of baptism is central, as Torrance also emphasises the eschatological implications promised in Baptism. This is a consequence of Christ's whole life:

> Baptism is not simply the starting of a process which we have to carry on and to which we have to make our own additions if we are to be saved. It is the initiation into a wholly new life which has been freely bestowed upon us in Christ, and which awaits His coming again for its full revelation and consummation.[26]

From this essay alone it is clear that Torrance is keen to emphasise the New Testament, as might be expected of a Reformed theologian, but also that his understanding of baptism has a strongly Christocentric and soteriological focus. Torrance highlighted the importance of Christ's whole life, including birth and resurrection, and, in doing so, reveals his belief that baptism is an objective sacrament that depends upon God's faithfulness and initiative alone. It is God's prevenient love that initiates. It is the Holy Spirit who is active and present. And it is Jesus Christ in whom the meaning of baptism found. Torrance maintains and develops these essentials of baptism in his later writings.

In Torrance's 1958 *Scottish Journal of Theology* article, 'The Origins of Baptism,' and his chapter in the second volume of *Conflict and Agreement in the Church* (1960), entitled 'The Sacrament of Baptism,' he develops his theology of baptism. In particular, the New Testament is explored at greater length, in order to support Torrance's view of baptism's origins. Whilst acknowledging that it is "by no means an easy matter to trace the precise origins of the rite of Christian Baptism both because there is a vast amount of material relevant to it and because the New Testament does not seem to offer any one clear line for consideration,"[27] Torrance draws a number of far-reaching conclusions. Chief among these are the links he sees between the Jewish tradition of proselyte baptism and Christian baptism, the importance of the baptism of John and Jesus, and the understanding of the Greek word *baptisma*. All these are bound up with and reveal Torrance's understanding of covenant.

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[25] Ibid., 133.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Sacrament of Baptism' in *Conflict and Agreement in the Church Volume Two* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960), 93.

Torrance suggests that proselyte baptism, which, as he understood it, "involved three main elements: circumcision, the sprinkling of sin-offering water on the third and seventh days after circumcision, and immersion,"[28] was "the rite of incorporation into the Covenant-people and of taking on the yoke of the Torah."[29] However, he also and importantly maintained that it could also be a "considerable help in understanding the teaching of the New Testament"[30] in regards to Christian baptism. Drawing on the Hebrew concepts of *gerim* (convert) and *hibri* (Hebrew), Torrance outlined the way in which circumcision was given to Abraham and his family "as *hibri* in ratification of the Covenant and in seal of the divine promise attached to it."[31] Whilst highlighting that circumcision was related to both the promise of a country and the promise of messianic future,[32] with circumcision being "a sign and seal of its promised fulfilment,"[33] Torrance concluded that circumcision had been superseded by baptism, because baptism takes "the place of circumcision as the sign of seal the New Covenant."[34] According to Torrance, circumcision is fulfilled in the New Covenant,

> (a) in the blood of Christ, which is the blood of the New Covenant, that is in His total circumcision and crucifixion; and (b) in His gift of the Holy Spirit. With these two facts the Old Covenant no longer remains in force in the old form, and therefore the outward sign of it is abrogated or rather displaced by a sign appropriate to the fulfilled reality of the New Covenant in Christ.[35]

This is the same argument that Torrance uses to suggest that the ritual of sprinkling of water (*baptizein*) over animal sacrifices was reinterpreted by Ezekiel to relate to spiritual cleansing and renewal brought about by God.[36] With circumcision being reinterpreted "in terms of a messianic gift of the Spirit," Torrance suggests that the sprinkling of water added "to the idea of a baptism of the Spirit which was at once un-sinning and quickening."[37] Drawing on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Torrance concludes that in the New Testament, "the Old Testament rites are regarded as fulfilled in Christ Himself, the Mediator of the New Covenant, who, like the red heifer, suffered in vicarious sacrifice."[38] Therefore, reinterpreting the old in light of the new, "the language of the old rites is used to interpret the relation of this baptismal rite to Christ's fulfilment of the Covenant and His

[28] Ibid., 96.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 97
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 98.
[34] Ibid., 99.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 101.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

opening up for us a new and living way into the holy presence of God."[39] Thus, Torrance is able to use this aspect of proselyte baptism to emphasis the soteriological dimension of baptism and the cleansing effect brought about by Jesus in and through the New Covenant.

Turning to the question of immersion, Torrance uses examples of Near East practices using water to highlight their role as rites of initiation. In particular, he suggests that the rite associated with *laver* in the Tabernacle, was "a liturgical extension into the worship of Israel of its sanctification and cleansing as a people taken into holy Covenant with God."[40] For the proselytes who underwent such a ritual of immersion, Torrance suggests that this signified "their participation in the mighty acts of Israel's redemption out of Egypt at the Exodus, their entry into the holy and priestly people of the Covenant, and their readiness through sanctification to receive instruction from the Law of God and to come under its yoke."[41] Consequently, this rite represented the recreation and separation of the people of Covenant from "darkness and uncleanness of the heathen world to live within the light and purity of God's revelation and appointed way of life."[42] Torrance is keen to make the connection between repentance and purification, which he does by drawing on documents from Qumran and from Damascus. These examples emphasise covenantal oath taking and the need for a community that seeks to live out the "Covenant will of God."[43] Torrance outlines the influence of these practices on the New Testament understanding of the church, as well as highlighting their point of departure from one another:

> The difference between the conception of the Covenant Community in the documents of Qumran and Damascus and the Christian conception is that the Church is the people of the New Covenant only because, and on the ground of the fact that, the Covenant has actually been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who gathers up Israel in Himself and is the beginning of a New Israel embracing all who are gathered into the Name of Christ and are baptized with His Spirit. It is in and through Jesus Christ and by the power of His Spirit that the Covenant will of God is at last enacted into the existence of God's people.[44]

Thus, whilst Scott concludes "Torrance does not place a major emphasis upon the covenant nor use covenantal language,"[45] his exploration of these ideas indicates his engagement with this key topic.

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[39] Ibid., 102.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 103.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 105.
[44] Ibid., 106.
[45] John Scott, 'Recovering the Meaning of Baptism in Westminster Calvinism in Critical Dialogue with Thomas F. Torrance,' 102.

Torrance continues to appeal to the language of covenant when addressing the question of the relationship of the individual to the "corporate baptismatic event." Here he suggests that the use of the language of the Covenant be used to expound the question of how baptism can be "the Sacrament of 'the One and the Many'," [46] drawing upon God's covenant with Abraham, which was, he suggests, "none other than the Covenant of grace which He established with creation of the world, and which took on a redemptive purpose with the rebellion and fall of man." [47] Circumcision is the sign and seal of this covenant. Acknowledging that God's people could not fulfil the requirements of holiness that were expected of God's covenant-partner, Torrance concludes that a messiah, who would be both servant and mediator, could fulfil these requirements:

> That fulfilment we have in Jesus the chosen Servant-Son, who fulfilled the Covenant both from the side of God and from the side of man, and so mediated a New Covenant which set the relations of men with God wholly on a new basis. [48]

Torrance suggests that it was the baptism of Jesus by John, which he sees as in itself "one of the saving acts inaugurating the Kingdom," [49] "which transformed John's rite of Baptism into Christian Baptism." [50] Torrance distinguishes between the terms *baptismos* and *baptisma,* suggesting that the latter was only ever used in Christian literature and that it was "not used of John's Baptism outside the New Testament." [51] In this way, Torrance sees the term *baptisma* as closely connected to *kerygma,* and concludes that they share a fundamental meaning, "referring to the mighty acts of God in Christ that are proclaimed in the Word and Sacrament." [52] For Torrance this recognition focuses attention firmly upon Christ, rather than on the outward rite:

> *baptisma* by its very nature does not direct attention to itself as a rite (that would be as *baptismos*) or to him who administers it, but directs us at once beyond to Christ Himself and to what He has done on our behalf; that is, to the objective and fulfilled reality. [53]

Consequently, Torrance argues that the association of *baptisma* with *baptizein* "is clearly more than Semitism," but instead designed to reinforce the centrality of Christ's work:

> Christ deliberately linked His Baptism in the Jordan with His death on the Cross, and with the whole course of His ministry in obedience and passion on our behalf; and thereby drive home the fact that our Baptism in the Name of Christ is a

[46] Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Sacrament of Baptism,' 120.
[47] Ibid., 121.
[48] Ibid., 122.
[49] Ibid., 107.
[50] Ibid., 108.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 110.
[53] Ibid., 111.

> covenanted consociation with Him in all He did to fulfil righteousness from His Baptism in the Jordan to His crucifixion on the Cross.[54]

On the basis of this argument, Torrance is able to conclude that the fulfilled nature of the covenant means that it is "an accomplished fact, a finished work, a completed act of pure grace."[55] Through Christ's sacrifice, a redemptive work has been wrought. Torrance can therefore conclude that baptism

> is the Sacrament of the obedience of Christ offered in our stead in which He throughout His life and in His death stood in our place and gave to God an account for us, submitting to the Father's judgement upon our sin and guilt; and therefore it is also the Sacrament of the Father's satisfaction in the life and work of His Beloved Son whom He sent to carry through this redemptive work on our behalf.[56]

Here, the soteriological emphasis is paramount. However, also central is the importance, once again, of the incarnation, which Torrance believed to have been neglected in sacramental theology. It was a vital component of his theology of baptism:

> Ultimately the Sacrament of Baptism is grounded in the incarnation in which the eternal Son immersed Himself in our mortal human life and assumed us into oneness with Himself that He might heal us and through the whole course of His obedience reconcile us to the Father in an abiding union and communion with Him.[57]

This statement reflects Torrance's belief that the sacramental seal of the covenant is "the seal of union with Christ and of communion with the Father through union with Christ."[58] God, the "Head" of the Covenant, requires a "corresponding holiness from his covenant-partner," in order for his desire that "His people should live in fellowship with Him and share in His own Holiness," to be fulfilled.[59] Torrance believed that Jesus had completely fulfilled this requirement and his language of healing clearly has soteriological undertones. In 'The Sacrament of Baptism' he affirmed:

> In Jesus Christ God has not only done a work of grace for us and upon us in which He has done away with our guilt and sin and set us free, but He has also provided us in the obedient humanity of Jesus Christ with a perfected communion between man and God in which the Covenant-union is fully and finally actualized.[60]

Thus, whilst Torrance does utilise the language of covenant, it is also clear that Scott is correct to assert that he places baptism within the context of incarnational redemption. For

[54] Ibid., 113.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 123.
[57] Ibid., 117.
[58] Ibid., 123.
[59] Ibid., 121.
[60] Ibid., 122.

Torrance, "the form that this Covenant-Communion takes is the Church, the body of Christ," into which holy baptism is the sacrament of initiation.[61] He believed that the Church was "founded with creation, with the establishment of the One Covenant of grace," that was, nevertheless, "proleptically conditioned by the Incarnation and Redemption."[62] Thus, baptism is a sign and seal of this new covenant, which offers initiation into this communion and it is "the Sacrament of the fact that in Jesus Christ God has bound Himself to us and bound us to Himself, before ever we have bound ourselves to Him."[63] Reflecting his rejection of federal theology, Torrance asserts that baptism is not "the Sacrament of a Covenant voluntarily made between two partners," and negates any suggestion of contract.[64] Instead, he suggests that the biblical covenant is made "wholly and graciously" by God and "depends therefore entirely upon the divine faithfulness."[65] On this basis, Torrance can affirm:

> Baptism is above all the Sacrament of that vicarious obedience of the Son to the Father which we are given to share through the Spirit; but as such it is a sharing in a finished work to which we cannot add one iota of our own, it is a participation in a righteousness not our own, in a justification which is a reality independent of our faith.[66]

This aspect of Torrance's theology is often attributed to what he calls the "dimension of depth" and is expounded in his 1975 paper, 'The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church,' in which he reaffirms much of what he had said in his earlier work. However, he also unpacked what he perceived to be some of the early Christian problems associated with baptism. A key theme of his 1975 paper is Torrance's suggestion that modern theology has paid "more rigorous attention" to "the humanity of Christ," which has allowed for greater assimilation with "its saving significance."[67] To that end, Torrance suggests that there has been a movement of thought, which has sought to trace the sacraments "back to their ultimate ground in the Incarnation and in the vicarious obedience of Jesus Christ in the human nature which he took from us and sanctified in and through his self-offering to the Father."[68] Torrance here argued that in and through the one baptism,

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[61] Ibid., 123.
[62] Torrance, The School of Faith, cxix-cxx, in Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the* Trinity, 266.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Torrance, 'The Sacrament of Baptism,' 123.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church, Vol.2*, 124.
[67] T.F.Torrance, "The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church," in *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Great Britain: Geoffrey Chapman 1975), 82.
[68] Ibid.

Jesus Christ has made himself "both its material content and its active agent."[69] Thus, emphasising the historical Jesus and his whole life, Torrance suggested that sacramentally, in Baptism, Jesus is proclaimed as

> the primary *mysterium* or *sacramentum* … the incarnate reality of the Son of God who has incorporated himself into our humanity and assimilated the people of God into himself as his own Body, so that the sacraments have to be understood as concerned with our *koinonia* or participation in the mystery of Christ and his Church through the *koinonia* or communion of the Holy Spirit.[70]

This description leads Torrance to expound his "dimension of depth theory," which refuses to view baptism "in the 'flat'," simply as an event, ritual, or ethical act, but which sees it as deriving its meaning always and only from God's prior activity:

> Certainly ritual and ethical acts have their proper place in the administration of baptism, but baptism itself is focused beyond those acts upon the one saving act of God embodied in Jesus Christ in such a way that, when the Church baptises in his name, it is actually Christ himself who is savingly at work, pouring out his Spirit upon us and drawing us within the power of his vicarious life, death and resurrection.[71]

Here too, Torrance focuses attention firmly upon Christ, rather than on the outward rite. He highlights, once more, the distinction between the terms *baptismos* and *baptisma*, which he believes "may well have been coined with the intention of expressing Christian baptism in this objective sense."[72] That is:

> when we regard Christian baptism in this way, not as *baptismos* but as *baptisma*, we find it to be grounded in the whole incarnational event in which the birth of Jesus, his baptism in the Jordan, his vicarious life, as well as his death and resurrection, and the pouring out of his Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost, all have their essential place.[73]

Torrance believes that there is "*one baptism* and *one Body* through the *one Spirit*," and that when an individual is baptised, they are initiated into and share "the one vicarious *baptisma* of Christ."[74] Consequently, Baptism can only be received; nothing, as Torrance had stated previously, can be added to it.

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[69] Ibid., 83.
[70] Ibid., 82
[71] Ibid., 83.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 84.
[74] Ibid., 87.

Expanding on his theory of the "dimension of depth," Torrance argues that in order for *baptisma* to be properly understood, "three pictures … have to be combined stereoscopically."[75] These are:

> the baptism of Jesus in water and the Spirit at the Jordan, his baptism in blood on the Cross, and the baptism of the Church in his Spirit at Pentecost.[76]

Indeed, it is what Jesus has accomplished through his birth, life, death and resurrection that, in Torrance's view, "stands behind the administration of baptism to us, supplies it with its ground of reality, and is effective through it."[77] Torrance argues that when this stereoscopic view of baptism breaks down problems arise, and he believes that this is what occurred in early Christianity. In regards to the meaning of baptism, Torrance suggests that in the West baptism was not viewed in its objective reality – that is, in relation to the vicarious work of Christ – but rather, as a work of cleansing and renewing. As a result, baptism came to be understood as "a sacrament concerned only with original and past sin," and tended to restrict the scope of baptism to the starting of a process which required to be completed."[78]

Another problem that Torrance perceived was rooted in Arianism and the rise of dualism, which Torrance believed had resulted in a split between water-baptism and spirit-baptism. In Torrance's opinion, it was Irenaeus who "had discerned most clearly the basic problems that had arisen," leading Torrance to affirm that "no finer teaching on baptism is to be found in the whole of the early Church than that which has come down to us from Irenaeus."[79] Given Torrance's emphasis on the incarnation and the objective nature of baptism, it is not too surprising that he finds Irenaeus important:

> The distinctive contribution of Irenaeus lies in his stress on the relation of Christian baptism to the miraculous birth of Christ as well as to his death and resurrection, for our birth of the Spirit is derived from Jesus' own birth and is dependent on it, and of course it is in infant baptism above all that that relation becomes most apparent.[80]

Yet, as Torrance affirms Irenaeus, he then moves on to discuss the problems he believes to be inherent in the Augustinian tradition. The first is the "Augustinian notion of a sacrament as the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace."[81] This, Torrance

[75] Ibid., 88.
[76] Ibid., 89.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 90.
[79] Ibid., 94.
[80] Ibid., 94-95.
[81] Ibid., 95.

maintained, had given rise to a problematic sacramental dualism, which had in turn resulted in a problematic focus on the doctrinal importance of baptism, and an overemphasis on its administration:

> Once we operate with a framework of thought in which the heavenly and earthly, the eternal and the temporal, the spiritual and the physical, are divided, then the rite of baptism becomes detached as *baptismos* from the objective reality of *baptisma* in the Incarnation, water-baptism and Spirit-baptism fall apart, and the immediate centre of significance tends to be transferred to the performance of the rite.[82]

Torrance rejected any notion that baptism can cause, contain or confer grace, and, on another note, abhorred any understanding that did not emphasise the objectivity of baptism. Indeed, whilst he affirmed Tertullian's view of baptism as being about the forgiveness of sins and the gifting of the Holy Spirit, Torrance rejected Tertullian's idea that baptism was dependent upon "the candidate's response, and not upon the divine promise so much as upon the vows of the baptised."[83] This had led Tertullian to advise the postponement of the baptism of infants "until they were able to shoulder the burden of it and attain the sound faith necessary for salvation."[84] In summing up, within a Trinitarian framework, Torrance once again affirmed the objective nature of baptism and emphasised the passive nature of humanity:

> If we reject the idea of an intermediate realm of supernatural grace between God and man, as surely we must do, then are we are left with two alternative positions for our understanding of baptism (a) a return to a sacramental dualism between water-baptism and Spirit-baptism, in which the meaning of baptism is found not in a direct act of God but in an ethical act on the part of man made by way of response to what God has already done on his behalf; or (b) an even stronger unity between water-baptism and Spirit-baptism objectively determined by the saving act of God in the incarnate Son and by his direct act now through the Spirit.[85]

In keeping with his earlier expositions of his baptismal theology, Torrance opted for the second option, and concluded his paper with an affirmation of the objective nature of the one baptism into the Trinitarian name of God, "in which Christ participated actively and vicariously as Redeemer, and the Church participated passively and receptively as the redeemed Community." Within the saving operation of the economic Trinity, Torrance suggests, therefore:

> the focus of attention is necessarily directed upon Jesus Christ himself, for it is only *in him* that God is incarnate and it is *through him* alone that the saving operation of God takes concrete form in our creaturely existence, and therefore it is only through *our union with him* that we share in all that God has done for us.[86]

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 96.
[84] Ibid., 97.
[85] Ibid., 99.
[86] Ibid., 104.

It is apparent that in all three of the papers explored here, Torrance maintained a consistent theology of baptism whilst developing his approach. He propounds a Christocentric baptismal theology, seeking to emphasise the importance of the whole life of Jesus and, in doing so, encouraging the reader to view baptism through the lens of soteriology, that is, as the one, all inclusive, vicarious baptism of Christ for all. Torrance also maintained that it is only through our union with Jesus, that we are able to share in all that God has done for us, and considered Christian baptism to be the fulfilment of the covenant; an objective, complete act of pure grace, through which Jesus has sanctified all of humanity through his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension.

In his exposition, Torrance clearly drew on the work of church fathers such as Athanasius and Irenaeus to support his theology, whilst offering criticism of aspects of Tertullian and Augustine's theology in relation to what he views as their "subjective" and dualistic understandings of baptism. Many commentators have observed the way in which Torrance appears to use the theology of others in order to create something new and original. Robert Walker, writing in volume one of *Participatio,* suggests: "[Torrance's] theology is highly original … he made new connections between known theological ideas and concepts."[87] Nevertheless, Walker believes that this "fertility and fruitfulness" left Torrance "open to a certain weakness."[88] Commenting on this, Walker writes:

> [Torrance's] habit of seeing things as a whole, of seeing scripture and doctrine in terms of their 'scopus' in Christ, of interpreting theological statements not just in terms of their syntactical and historical setting but in terms of the reality they refer to, means that his focus on the ultimate reference of statements can lead him sometimes to jump to conclusions in interpreting historical theologians.[89]

Indeed, Walker goes as far as to suggest that Torrance's interpretation of many theological texts he cites led him to ideas that "seem to go beyond their author's own immediate thought and setting," often leading others to perceive him as "making other theologians appear too much to have the same theology as he has."[90] Elmer Colyer goes as far as to suggest that

> Torrance readers cannot but feel a little cautious about his interpretations of a variety of theologians in the history of the church when those interpretations seem to closely approximate Torrance's own position; however, this is in large measure

[87] Robert T. Walker, *Participatio*: The Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship, Vol. 1, 2009, 43.
[88] Ibid., 45.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid., 46.

> due to the creative dialectic Torrance employs between historical investigation and his own constructive perspective.[91]

This is certainly an observation that has been also made by others, not least John Scott, who suggests that "Torrance exaggerates the degree to which his views may be found in the early church fathers and in Calvin."[92] Scott convincingly argues that "the 'salvation' linked by Torrance with baptism is paradigmatically different to the 'salvation' linked with baptism in the Westminster tradition."[93] He believes this to be one of the key reasons why Torrance's theology of baptism has been "largely ignored."[94] Whilst Torrance remained an advocate of infant baptism, Scott maintains that he not only departed from, but "ignored the traditional covenantal arguments that have been used to provide a theological basis for infant baptism."[95] In Scott's view, Torrance, in and through the work of the Special Commission, was "really teaching his new incarnational theology" and "trying to educate the readers on a new soteriological paradigm."[96] This was a soteriology that drew on the theology of other Christian thinkers, but also offered something new, leading Scott to conclude his thesis by suggesting "that there is more innovation than heritage in Torrance."[97]

The question of what was new in Torrance's baptismal soteriology is an important one. Scott highlights three ways in which Torrance's soteriological paradigm differed from the traditional understanding:[98]

> 1. the human condition that Christ came to solve is an ontological deficiency; 2. as a result of a different understanding of the human condition therefore the nature of the atonement is different; 3. the ground on which baptism is based is different.

It would seem that a fundamental difference in Torrance's soteriology was an ontological one and that this was bound up with his understanding of the unity between the incarnation and the atonement and humanity's union with God. In a bid to ground baptism within the life of the historical Jesus, and thus to avoid notions of "some mystical and timeless – spaceless – reality,"[99] Molnar suggests that Torrance adopted and applied the doctrine of *homoousion;* "that is, the doctrine that Jesus is one being with God the Father from eternity

[91] Elmer Colyer cited in John Scott, 152.
[92] John Scott, Abstract.
[93] John Scott, 60.
[94] Ibid., 65.
[95] Ibid., 192.
[96] Ibid., 115.
[97] Ibid., 212.
[98] Ibid., 60.
[99] Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity*, 269.

by nature as the Son, and with us by virtue of the incarnation."[100] In doing so, Molnar suggests that in Torrance's view "grace cannot be in any way detached from Christ himself as God communicating himself to us."[101] McGrath also holds that the doctrine of *homoousion* is a strong, recurrent feature within Torrance's Trinitarian thinking. Whilst the three levels are "mutually correlated,"[102] for Torrance, the centrality of Christ in the sacrament of baptism is of uppermost importance, because the "dimension of depth" highlights Christ's role as the intermediary between God and humanity:

> We are not concerned in the Sacraments only with two dimensions, with the act of God and the act of human response; we are concerned above all with the third dimension in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, and therefore with the new humanity in Christ who is God and man, in which we are by grace given to share.[103]

For Torrance, this insight belonged "to the very essence of the New Testament gospel,"[104] and was in keeping with his understanding of the *homoousion,* and its importance in the relationship between revelation and re-creation. For Torrance then, "Christology and soteriology are held together in an inseparable unity by the fact that each is grounded in and articulates the *homoousion.*"[105]

Exploring Torrance's "dimension of depth" theory further, Habet believes that for Torrance, "the *Christus praesens* and the *Christus futuris* are both grounded in the *Christus adventus*."[106] For this reason, Habet suggests, a further consequence of the "dimension of depth" understanding of baptism was the emphasis Torrance placed upon what he called "the perfect tense of salvation," which, in Habet's reading, meant that "Torrance is not averse to using the language of 'baptismal regeneration'."[107] Although Torrance emphasises that "it is not of course the rite of Baptism which regenerates, but in Baptism our regeneration in Christ is declared,"[108] he nonetheless believes that baptism "is *sacramentally* enacted as an image and likeness of the birth and resurrection of Christ,"[109] and maintains that

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[100] Ibid., 20.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Alister E. McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1999), 173.
[103] Torrance, *Gospel, Church and Ministry,* 86.
[104] Ibid., 85.
[105] McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography,* 1154.
[106] Habet, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 176.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Torrance, "The Meaning of Baptism," 133
[109]Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church, Vol.2,* 131.

> Our regeneration has already taken place … and proceeds from them [birth and resurrection] more by way of manifestation of what has already happened than as new effect resulting from them.[110]

Hunsinger also explores Torrance's view of the present, future, and perfect tense of salvation. He suggests that

> If salvation occurs *essentially* also in the present tense alongside the perfect tense, then its present and future tenses must somehow *supplement and complete a process* that Christ initiated in his earthly existence, but did not entirely fulfil.[111]

When this is placed alongside Habet's recognition that Torrance's doctrine of baptism has a corresponding objective, subjective and eschatological dimension (another way of asserting his "stereoscopic" view), then there is support for the notion that in Christ "the present tense manifests and fulfils the perfect tense."[112] That is, the "depth dimension of the sacraments is both retrospective and prospective because they involve participation in Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension."[113]

Torrance elaborates on the efficacy of baptism in a long section elucidating the nature of baptism. Here he concurs with the idea that baptism is complete:

> It belongs to the peculiar nature of Baptism that it promises us a redemption which has already been accomplished in Christ; and therefore in Baptism the end is already given to us in the beginning. Baptism is not simply the starting of a process which we have to carry on and to which we have to make our own additions if we are to be saved. It is the initiation into a wholly new life which has been freely bestowed upon us in Christ, and which awaits His coming again for its full revelation and consummation. That is why the promise of Baptism and its fulfilment cannot be tied down to the enactment of a ceremony or be exhausted in this life. It is a promise that is valid for the whole of our life and reaches out beyond into the resurrection and the new creation.[114]

On this basis, Torrance negates any notion that baptism is a process, continuing to stress its fulfilled nature. In his view, despite acknowledgment of the eschatological reality of life and baptism, and his recognition that baptism is a promise given by Christ to the church in a period between two Advents, that is, the incarnation and the resurrection, there is still the presumption that salvation is complete.

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[110] Ibid.
[111] George Hunsinger, "The Dimension of Depth: Thomas F. Torrance on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54.2 (2001), 157.
[112] Habet, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 175.
[113] Ibid., 178.
[114] Ibid.

Torrance's position raises questions relating to discipleship and ethics. On the one hand, it could be suggested that through the power of Christ's Spirit moving within the church, Torrance expected discipleship to be the way for ethical acts to find a place and outworking. Indeed, he later suggests "the act of baptism is to be understood in terms of the reciprocity between divine and human agency which [God] has established for us in the whole historical Jesus Christ."[115] This is a reciprocity that, in Torrance's view, God "continues to maintain with us in the space-time structures of our worldly existence through his Spirit."[116] Yet, on the other hand, there remains a tension between the receptive nature of the church in baptism and Christ's finished work in creation. I would suggest that Torrance focuses too much attention upon the act of baptism itself in relation to the character and movement of God, and does not go far enough in elucidating the potential outworking and purposes of baptism. This is particularly apparent when it comes to considering the part that the baptised are to play within the economic, saving activity, of the Triune God into whose name they are initiated.

Alexis Torrance concurs with this view, suggesting that "the theology of baptism in Torrance offers a refreshing and vigorously Christocentric vision, but it is one that comes over as incomplete, lacking as it does any explicit ascetic dimension."[117] Given that Torrance describes Christ as "the primary *mysterium* or *sacramentum*" and utilises the concept of *koinonia*, along with the idea that Christ is the "material content" of baptism, through which he is "pouring out his Spirit upon us," perhaps the concept of *kenosis* could have developed this idea. Indeed, in the light of Torrance's suggestion "that our incorporation into Christ is grounded entirely and primarily upon His incorporation into us,"[118] if the ontological reality of God is eternal love, far from relinquishing divinity, *kenosis* might help discern the ways in which the baptised participate in the mystery of God, share in the self-emptying nature of incarnation, and receive new life through death and resurrection, so as to live life in all its fullness. Torrance, however, does not make use of this metaphor, and holds firm to the passive nature of the recipients of baptism.

An explanation for Torrance's lack of focus upon the post-baptismal activity of the baptised can perhaps be found in his increasing objection to theological dualism, already mentioned above. According to McGrath, this shift began in 1962. It was accompanied by

[115] Ibid., 102.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Alexis Torrance, 'The theology of Baptism in T.F. Torrance and it's ascetic correlate in St Mark the Monk,' in *Participatio*: The Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship, Vol. 4, 2013, 148.
[118] Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church, Vol.2,* 119.

Torrance's "increasing suspicion over the nature of Augustine's approach to theology,"[119] which centred upon the division of water-baptism and spirit-baptism. Keen to ensure the objective nature of the dynamic activity of the Triune God, Torrance maintained that *baptisma* was the key to understanding Christian baptism and holding together the whole Christ event. Torrance's use of the term *baptisma* and its implications were introduced above and will be explored further in the next chapter. For now, it is important to highlight that language and hermeneutical approach were often at the forefront of discussions. Indeed, in Torrance's correspondence with Karl Barth, Torrance infers that at certain points in the Reports of the Special Commission he was unhappy with the language used and sought to persuade the Commission to depart from certain decisions without success.[120] From their correspondence, however, it is clear that Torrance's theology of baptism was significantly at variance with Barth's.

Karl Barth, who is often described as the most prominent Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, was a theologian whose writings captured the imagination of many, not least in Scotland. Alister McGrath is surely correct to assert that:

> Perhaps the most significant factor in establishing Barth as a significant theological presence in Scotland was the long-established Scottish tradition of seeing "Christian dogmatics" as an integral element of Christian theology.[121]

Torrance played a key role in the translation of Barth's work into English, in particular the *Church Dogmatics* and its dissemination in the British context. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Barth, and it would appear that the appreciation was mutual: Barth wished "that Torrance should be a member of the committee which would complete the *Church Dogmatics* in the event of his premature death," and suggested "that Torrance should succeed him at Basel on his retirement."[122] Yet, whilst Torrance was an admirer of Barth's theology, McGrath remarks that he also "reserved the right to criticize where he felt that this was appropriate."[123] They differed on many points, not least the doctrine of baptism.

Despite their differences, Torrance's theology shows many similarities with Barth's work, particularly as the latter expounded it in *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism* (1943). These included the Christocentric understanding of baptism, the dependence upon Christ alone for its efficacy, its once and for all nature, the belief in baptism's covenantal

[119] McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* 142.
[120] Scott, 122.
[121] McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography*, 124.
[122] Ibid., 115.
[123] Ibid., 138.

nature, and the conviction that baptism should be administered only within the worshipping community. Barth argued that "the power or potency of Baptism" consisted in the fact that "as an element in the Church's message it is a free word and deed of Jesus Christ Himself."[124] It was, therefore, a "living and expressive representation of Christ's high-priestly death and resurrection,"[125] was part of the "Church's proclamation,"[126] and its meaning and intention lay in the glorification of God.[127] However, even in these lectures a certain dissatisfaction with particular key aspects of the doctrine of baptism was emerging, and this would become more apparent in Barth's *Church Dogmatics* IV/4. His concerns were influenced to a large extent by the work of his son, Markus Barth, who in 1951, published *Die Taufe, Ein Sakrament? Ein exegetischer Beitrag zum Gespräch über die kirchliche Taufe*.

One of the major changes in Karl Barth's theology of baptism lay in a shift in his understanding of the sacraments. Whilst he continued to hold that "baptism responds to a mystery, the sacrament of the history of Jesus Christ, of His resurrection, of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit," in his later works he no longer believed that baptism was "a mystery or sacrament."[128] He justified this huge change in his theological position on the grounds that scripture was unable to clarify or confirm the sacramental nature of baptism in the New Testament. For Barth, the precedent for baptism lay in Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, and not in the commandment found at the end of Matthew's Gospel.[129] In *Church Dogmatics* IV/4, Barth asserted that "it is highly and even supremely probable that this Christian action is not to be understood as a divine work or word of grace … it is not be understood as a mystery or sacrament along the lines of the dominant theological position."[130] Rather, Barth argued:

> Baptism is…to be understood against the background of an understanding of an ordered correspondence between a prevenient, causative divine act of saving grace, and a subsequent human act of confession, thanksgiving, and obedience. Only with both of these elements involved can baptism serve as the foundation of the Christian life and the formation of a person who is faithful to God.[131]

[124] Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism* (London: SCM Press 1948), 15.
[125] Ibid., 18.
[126] Ibid., 34.
[127] Ibid., 25.
[128] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, vol. IV/4: Baptism as the Foundation of the Christian life* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1969), 102.
[129]Tracey Mark Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism: Karl Barth's Ecclesiology in Light of His Understanding of Baptism* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications 2010), 29.
[130] Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/4*, 128.
[131] Ibid., 41.

This distinction between God's divine action and human action led Barth, not only to alter his position on its nature as a sacrament, but also to revise his stance on the relationship between water baptism and Spirit baptism.

Whilst Torrance held the view that water and Spirit baptism were inseparable, Barth disagreed, arguing that Spirit baptism always preceded baptism with water. The former was God's act, and "does not take place in a man either with or through the fact that he receives water baptism."[132] The decision to be baptised, although always free and personal, was not a "capricious act," but rather an act into which the baptized enters "because he is invited and commanded to do it by the grace of God which has come upon him … in short, by Jesus Christ Himself."[133] To some extent, this position was shared by Torrance, who was keen to emphasise the prevenient nature of God's activity in baptism. However, by separating Spirit baptism from water, Barth placed an additional focus on the formative function of baptism and the responsibility and task of the baptised. Whilst holding that a person "does not become a Christian through his human decision or his water baptism,"[134] he argued that baptism in the Spirit marked "the beginning of the new Christian life,"[135] which starts with the work of God's Spirit and the "knowledge of the work and word of God,"[136] but still requires a human response to reach its fulfilment. Conversion was a key component of this new way, and water baptism was a sign of that conversion. Barth was adamant that conversion was only a beginning, which, when combined with the promise of water baptism, "points forward, away from itself and beyond itself, to its fulfilment in the future baptism with the Holy Spirit."[137] Thus, the baptised find that the Spirit is always both before and after, preceding and proceeding all activity in and outwith history.

In light of this, the vocational and ethical outworking of baptism became central to Barth's baptismal theology. Spirit baptism, he argued, liberated the baptised for "Christian and churchly responsibility," while the moment of water baptism reflected the reality of this "entering of Christians into the community."[138] For Barth, baptism was an act of hope, which pointed to the fact that the church did not exist in and for itself, but had a "proleptic and prophetic ministry of making known to the world … that which is given to those inside

[132] Ibid., 32.
[133] Ibid., 43.
[134] Ibid., 32-33.
[135] Ibid., 38.
[136] Ibid., 138.
[137] Ibid., 71.
[138] Ibid., x.

in the form of knowledge."[139] With a strong eschatological tone, aligned with the vocational nature of Jesus' own baptism, Barth affirmed that baptism was bound up with the Kingdom of God, and described how the church should live out its mission; in gratitude, obedience and hope. In this way, Barth grounded the Christian life firmly within the reconciliatory work of God, declaring:

> The efficacy of baptism consists in this, that the baptized person is placed once and for all under the sign of hope, in consequence of which he has death already behind him and only life in from of him, and in consequence of which is light will shine to the glory of God among the peoples, because his sins are forgiven.[140]

It was the knowledge of the compassionate love of God that led Barth to believe that baptism was an act that required of those who participated in it a "specific renunciation and specific pledge."[141] As a result, he thought "membership [of the church] is … not simply regional or by virtue of birth" but is an action that acknowledges "that one has been awakened, brought to life, by God."[142] Such awareness required personal response, decision and confession from the candidate;[143] something which Barth came to believe infant baptism could not provide.

By the 1950s Barth reckoned infant baptism to be "an empty ceremonial, a hole-in-the-corner affair,"[144] which has "monopolized the theology of baptism" for too long.[145] In his earliest lectures, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, he had questioned the practice of *baptismum infantium* and queried why the church had "obviously aimed at making the road and the door as wide as possible, when in this matter they should plainly be small and narrow?"[146] Such a belief stemmed from the idea that if baptism is not administered in obedience and proper order, in relation to the "willingness and readiness of the baptized," then it is "a clouded baptism," which "ought not to be repeated." Indeed, Barth's words continued to be strong and severe,

> It is, however, a wound in the body of the Church and a weakness for the baptized, which can certainly be cured but which are so dangerous that another question presents itself to the Church: how long is she prepared to be guilty of the occasioning of this wounding and weakening through a baptismal practice which is, from this standpoint, arbitrary and despotic?[147]

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[139] Ibid., 199-200.
[140] Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, 55.
[141] Barth, *Church Dogmatics, IV/4*, 158.
[142] Ibid., 702.
[143] Ibid., 192.
[144] Michael Green, *Baptism: Its Purpose, Practice, and Power* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock 1987), 97.
[145] David F. Wright, *What has Infant Baptism done to Baptism? An Enquiry at the end of Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster 2005), 19.
[146] Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*,38.
[147] Ibid., 40.

The importance of "the consciousness of the once-for-allness" of the beginning brought about by baptism, was so important to Barth, that he stated that infant baptism was also a "perverted ecclesiastical practice."[148] The emphasis that he placed upon obedience and responsible Christian living, mitigated against indiscriminate baptism, and called for a response in and through active, confessional faith and discipleship.

As a result, Barth called into question the issue of membership and ecclesiology, posing the question as to whether, in the past, the "really operative extraneous ground for infant baptism" had been that "one did not want in any case or at any price to deny the existence of the evangelical Church in the Constantinian *corpus christianum* - and today one does not want to renounce the present form of the national church?"[149] This was an important question, especially given the Church of Scotland's role within Scottish society and the fact that the Special Commission had decided to maintain the traditional theological position regarding paedobaptism. In many ways this is not surprising, given the ecumenical discussions that were emerging at that time and the desire to find common ground. Yet, it perhaps points to a much deeper contextual issue. Duncan Forrester highlights that:

> It is symptomatic that the key point on which T. F. Torrance differed from the master was infant baptism. In the 1950s, T. F. Torrance headed a Church of Scotland Special Commission on Baptism which vigorously defended infant baptism and implied a conservative, Christendom-style ecclesiology in radical conflict with Barth's own assumption that Christendom was over and the West was once again a field of mission in which baptism of infants no longer made acceptable sense.[150]

Perhaps, unlike Barth and also Ernest Payne, who believed that they were "in an age which must be recognised to be post-Constantinian and post-Augustinian, if not post-Christian,"[151] the Special Commission had failed fully to realise, or worse had ignored, the context in which the church found itself, and believed that such a radical change in doctrinal theology was unnecessary. Regardless, Barth's questioning of infant baptism raises many issues, not only relating to the nature of the church and its mission, but also what it means to be initiated into a community of hope and participate, be a member, and belong. Indeed, perhaps the most challenging question posed by Barth was in relation to ecclesiology and his question, "where does it stand written that Christians may not be in

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[148] Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/3.2*, 517-18.
[149] Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism,* 52.
[150] J Forrester, *Truth Action: Explorations in Practical Theology*, 180.
[151] Payne,'Professor T. W. Manson on Baptism' 56.

the minority, perhaps in a very small minority?"[152] This cut to the heart of the subject of Christendom. Barth's criticism was that it had made "baptism an entrance card into the best European society."[153] He queried whether "what is really wanted for the people to remain a National Church in the present day sense of the term: a Church *of* the people, instead of a Church *for* the people?"[154] Barth argued that a smaller church meant a healthier church, focussed upon its surroundings and better able to serve those who were not a part of it. Thus, he was eager to break the identification of citizenship in society with membership in the church, highlighting that the two were not synonymous. Instead, Barth upheld the view that Christians were citizens of the Kingdom of God, and accordingly, should live in such a way that demonstrated this truth. By *Church Dogmatics* IV/4.4, Barth had turned categorically against infant baptism, declaring it to be "only half a baptism," and suggesting that it required a "supplemental rite."[155] He maintained that so long as the church "obstinately, against all better judgement and conscience, continues to dispense the water of baptism with the same undiscriminating generosity as it has now done for centuries," it was difficult for the Church to be "or become again…and essentially missionary and mature rather than immature Church."[156] On that basis, Barth was insistent that "the present distress of the Church" could well be attributed to the lack of attention it had paid to baptismal order and practice,[157] and was sure that making decision in this area would go a long way to solving the perceived problems.

All of this was in stark contrast to Torrance, who was a strong supporter of infant baptism. Thus, whilst Scott is correct to affirm that "Torrance especially promoted Barth's incarnational theology and his rejection of dualism as a way of reaching agreement on issues like baptism," he is also right to point out that "while using the same theological paradigm, each ended with distinctively different views of baptism."[158] This becomes apparent, not only in the theological differences highlighted above, but in the correspondence between the two men. Whilst agreeing with Torrance "in his criticism of the Westminster Standards" and appreciating "his Christological emphasis,"[159] Barth is not uncritical of his conclusions. Not only did he question why Torrance had "referred to

[152] Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism,* 53.
[153] Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/3.2,* 876.
[154] Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, 53.
[155] Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/4: Baptism as the Foundation of the Christian Life,* 188.
[156] Ibid., xi.
[157] Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, 36-37.
[158] Scott, 26.
[159] Karl Barth to Torrance, 8 April 1960: 'Die christologische Korrektur, der Sie die uberlieferte Lehre unterzogen haben, ist ja unverkennbar.' Cited in Scott, 121.

baptism as a 'means of grace' and a 'sacrament,' " but he also "enquires about the strange doctrine of the two languages." Scott highlights that Barth did "recognise that there is some 'new wine' in the report," but seems disappointed that "Torrance did not dare to take [Barth's] new approach."[160] Far from conceding this point, Torrance suggests that his interpretation of *baptisma* and *baptismos* is the different and radical new approach, but Barth does not understand it.[161] As Scott suggests, "if Barth can misunderstand Torrance here, then others will undoubtedly misunderstand Torrance" too.[162] In fact, that appears to have been what happened.

This chapter has examined and outlined the principal features of Torrance's theology of baptism and, in doing so, agrees with Scott that Torrance did develop a different soteriological paradigm to defend infant baptism than that which had been customary in the Church of Scotland, and in particular – despite his use of the language of covenant - that he departed from the covenantal arguments that were traditionally used to defend infant baptism. From 1955, Torrance brought these convictions to his convenorship of the Church of Scotland's Special Commission on Baptism. This thesis now moves on to assess the reports of that Special Commission with a view to exploring the extent to which the Commission was influenced by Torrance's views. It will draw attention to the places where Torrance's influence is apparent by comparing them with his theology of baptism as outlined in this chapter, consider the reception of the reports by the General Assembly, and highlight the main issues and themes that emerged from the work of the Special Commission. This will lay a foundation for discerning the meaning of baptism in the Church of Scotland in the 1950s and 1960s and Torrance's influence on it.

[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

Chapter Two

The Reports of the Special Commission on Baptism and their reception by the General Assembly

When the Special Commission on Baptism was set up in 1953, I do not think that anybody conceived that its life and work would take so long to complete. It was only after ten years of reports and the submission of 'The Doctrine of Baptism' (1960) that the Special Commission wound up its work in 1963. During these years, the Special Commission worked hard to offer a methodical examination of the historical development of baptismal doctrine and practice in order to fulfil its remit. As the reports unfold, the Church of Scotland's understanding of baptism, according to the Commission, is captured, and there runs a thread throughout that indicates something of the Special Commission's understanding, not only of baptism, but the nature and purpose of the Church. Reading an early report of the process, dating from 1954, it becomes apparent that this is a consequence of Torrance's strong belief in the importance of the doctrine of baptism. There he concludes his report to the General Assembly by stating that the work of the Special Commission intends to get "down to the bedrock," and build up "a constructive account of holy baptism which would be a value to the Church, in training its own men, and in inter-Church relations."[1] Torrance strongly believed, as he told the General Assembly, that "the whole building up of the Church as the Body of Christ depended on their understanding of this [baptism]."[2] From the beginning, then, ecclesiology was central to the Commission's deliberations; it is a prominent feature in the reports and should not be ignored. However, the extent to which ecclesiology was used to clarify the Commission's understanding of baptism is questionable, as, indeed, is the extent to which the Commission fulfilled their remit.

It is clear that the Special Commission succeeded in having its report 'The Doctrine of Baptism' accepted "by a majority of Presbyteries as a valid statement of biblical and Reformed doctrine" and commended by the 1963 General Assembly for "general consideration."[3] However, it failed to achieve the acceptance of the doctrine here presented as an "authoritative interpretation of the Biblical and Reformed doctrine as contained in the

[1] Torrance, Verbatim Minute of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1954, 463.
[2] Ibid., 464.
[3] David F. Wright, 'Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective,' 305.

primary and subordinate standards of the Church."[4] Commenting on the work of the Special Commission, David Wright suggests that

> The Commission's labours, resting largely on T.F.Torrance's work, suffered from a density of expression. Its arguments relied on some questionable linguistic analysis and focused on the theologically questionable notion that 'baptism' refers primarily to 'the one, all inclusive, vicarious baptism of Christ for all men.' This basic conception, which could distinguish between the 'water rite' and 'the real baptism – Christ's, issued in a doctrine of sophisticated elusiveness which not surprisingly – since it sat loose to historical and contemporary baptismal realities – proved unequal to the demands of pastoral confusion and disorder.[5]

Whilst some have commented upon the reports of the Special Commission and looked at the reception of the reports on the floor of the General Assembly, to my knowledge, an in-depth account of all the Commission's reports has never been attempted; nor have the minutes of the meetings of the Special Commission been considered. In this chapter, taking each report in turn, from 1955 to 1959, I will consider the reports of the Special Commission. In doing so, I will highlight the places where Torrance's theology of baptism is apparent, will point out where tensions arise, and, by exploring the discussions that emerged year on year in the General Assembly following each report of the Special Commission, will identity points of agreement and disagreement and discern the principal themes that guided the formation of doctrine which will be discussed at the end.

The 1955 Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism

The Scottish Reformation, which shaped the Church of Scotland, might seem like the most obvious place to begin in any conversation of baptismal understanding and policy within the Presbyterian system. Yet, the influence of the Reformed affirmation of sola scriptura meant that it was evident that the Bible would form the starting point for the Commission's work. Making reference to the changes and advances in Biblical studies at that time, not least the analytic approach to the scriptures which had been adopted by Church of Scotland scholars including William Manson and Matthew Black,[6] the first Interim Report, issued in 1955, suggested that those studies "are now revealing that Baptism belongs to almost every page of the New Testament," has a "supreme place"[7] and that, as such, "Baptism in this dimension of importance and glory … must be recovered in the Christian Church today."[8] The members of the Commission were eager to affirm that the New Testament was devoid

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism to the General Assembly, 1955, 611.
[7] Ibid., 661.
[8] Ibid., 613.

of sacramental dualism, suggested a corporate understanding of the Church as Christ's body, and ultimately pointed towards a definition of the sacraments that emphasised their relationship to God's action both in the world through the Incarnation and in the heart of the Church.[9] Thus, right from the outset, there is a belief that a retrieval of the importance of baptism, as presented in the New Testament, would have positive implications for ecclesiology in the present.

Indeed, whilst there is a clear acknowledgement that "the rite employed in the Christian Sacrament of Baptism was not a new one,"[10] but drew upon the ritual washing that was practised by both Jews and Gentiles alike, there is also an assertion that in the New Testament, through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, something new and unique had been established. Therefore, the initiation into the covenant community that was part of the story of God's people in the Old Testament (Exodus chapters 19 and 24, Deuteronomy 29 and Nehemiah 9) became, in baptism, an ingrafting into the new covenant community in and through Christ with the emergence of the Church. The ritual of circumcision that had been so prominent in the life of the people of Israel as a sign of entry into the covenant, was now, in the Christian practice, replaced.[11] For although proselyte baptism remained a ritualistic practice in Judaism after the birth of Christianity for the admission of Gentile converts,

> because Christ has once and for all shed his Blood of the New Covenant on the Cross, circumcision with its shedding of the blood of the Old Covenant was abrogated and reinterpreted, and the accompanying baptismal ablution of men, women and children was transformed into the Christian Sacrament of Baptism.[12]

Accordingly, the Commission asserted that it was through John the Baptist "that the transformation of the Jewish rite first took place"[13] and that "the Baptism of John (and in particular the Baptism of Jesus at the hands of John) is regarded as a great turning-point in the sacred history of Israel, as the mighty event inaugurating the Messianic Age."[14] Here the Commission drew on Torrance's distinction between BAPTISMOS, taken to mean the rite of washing, and BAPTISMA, which is considered to be "the event, or the act of God" and "found only in the New Testament and Christian usage, referring to Christian baptism."[15] As such, the Baptism of John is "regarded as the fulfilment of the Isaianic

[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 620.
[11] Ibid., 621.
[12] Ibid., 623.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 615.
[15] Ibid., 615-16.

prophecy of the *New Exodus"* and the "*fulfilment of the sacrificial cult* of Israel."[16] However, this is primarily as a result of the baptism of Jesus, which the Commission suggests is where the Christian rite originated and "where water-Baptism and Spirit-Baptism were joined together in a unity, thereafter determining the nature of Christian Baptism."[17] The Commission concludes the discussion of the Greek terms by affirming "that the BAPTISMA of which the New Testament speaks is the *One Baptism* of vicarious sacrifice on the Cross."[18] As such, not only does the baptism of Jesus unite spirit and water, but it also has soteriological significance:

> Primarily, BAPTISMA refers to the Baptism of Blood on the Cross on our behalf, but it also refers to the Sacrament of that Baptism in which all who at Christ's command are baptized in water into His name are through the Spirit given to share in His One Baptism, so that they die and rise with Him into newness of life.[19]

Thus, the Special Commission can assert that "Baptism is no mystical experience but the actual working out of the death and resurrection of Christ within the Church."[20]

The institution of Baptism as a sacrament has, for the Church of Scotland, always rested upon the command of Christ to his disciples after his resurrection and before his ascension, as found at the end of Matthew's Gospel (28.19). The Commission suggests that the Trinitarian charge to baptise is "to be understood in the light of: (A) the Pentecostal Baptism of the Spirit; and (B) Christ's own Baptism of water and the Spirit which was fulfilled in His death and resurrection."[21] All of this raises questions about ecclesiology which also concerned the Commission. What is Christian baptism? Who can be baptized? What does it mean to be baptized into the One Baptism? And what is the purpose of the Church into which the baptized are initiated?

For the Commission, the beginning of "the Christian *Sacrament* of Baptism properly dates from the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:4f, 2:17f),"[22] which also coincides with the formation and beginnings of the Church. Whilst it maintains that "that one Incarnational Baptism consummated in the Baptism of Blood on the Cross was undertaken for the sins of all men," the Commission suggests that "according to the New Testament

[16] Ibid., 616.
[17] Ibid., 617.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 618.
[20] Ibid., 649.
[21] Ibid., 614.
[22] Ibid., 618.

the universal Baptism was actualised at Pentecost in the Church only."[23] Not only does the Church have a special responsibility, but in order to be forgiven and reconciled, an individual must become part of the community that was realised at Pentecost. Indeed, believing that "through Baptism what Christ did for all men is actualised for us individually and personally in the Church, as *our* salvation,"[24] the idea that "the sacraments are to be understood in terms of the "*Mystery of Christ,*" pertaining to the "mighty and miraculous acts of God in history in the Incarnation and in the midst of His Church,"[25] it is suggested that the "Church is committed with the *stewardship* of the Mystery."[26] Therefore, through baptism, the individual, adult or child, is initiated "into the One Baptism common between Christ and His Church,"[27] highlighting the unity of the one body.

The question of who can be baptized into the one body is an important one, especially when considering the position of the Church of Scotland regarding the baptism of infants. Having already established that the ritual washing and circumcision practised in the Old Testament as signs of initiation into the Covenant Community had been superseded by baptism in the New Testament, the 1955 report expresses the opinion that

> The unanimous view of the Ancient Catholic Church predisposes us to regard Infant Baptism as the unchallenged practice of the Christian Church from the very beginning.[28]

This belief stemmed primarily from the absence of any explicit references in the New Testament excluding the baptism of children. Building upon the evidence regarding the baptism of children in Judaism and the Gentile world, the report asserts "in this situation the failure of the New Testament definitely to exclude it, predisposes us to believe that the Christian Church administered Holy Baptism to infants from the beginning.[29] Therefore, on the basis of an argument from silence, the report suggests that "the New Testament takes it for granted that infants are to be initiated into the New Covenant as they were into the Old"[30] and that if it "had intended to give injunctions explicitly excluding infant Baptism it would never have spoken so ambiguously of the Baptism of *whole households.*"[31] This leads to the affirmation that

[23] Ibid., 639.
[24] Ibid., 626.
[25] Ibid., 613.
[26] Ibid., 642.
[27] Ibid., 641.
[28] Ibid., 628.
[29] Ibid., 627.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

> Not only does the New Testament bear clear and wide-spread traces of infant Baptism through its pages, but it reveals a doctrine of Baptism which requires the Church to baptize its children.[32]

From an ecclesiological perspective, there appear to be three main reasons for this belief, based upon the relationships between children and the New Covenant, and on depictions of children in the Gospels and in the Epistles.

Drawing upon the words of Peter in Acts 2.38, and making reference to the following verse which affirms "the promise is unto you and your children," the report suggests "this is a Biblical way of speaking which includes children within the covenanting event."[33] Thus, whilst the report maintains that repentance is bound up with baptism, it upholds the belief that those adults who repent and are baptized should also have their children baptized, for in Acts 2.38-39 "we have an unequivocal insistence that children come within the Covenant and that the promise of the Spirit in Baptism is for them too."[34] The Commission also finds evidence for the conviction that children fall within the covenant in the gospels, particularly Matthew 18 and 19, where the welcome, acceptance and blessing of children and their place within the Kingdom of God are affirmed by Jesus. Indeed, the report suggests: " 'believe into' is equivalent to being 'baptized into' " and that "the Evangelists record the incident of the 'blessing' of the children in such a way as to exclude the possibility of any denial of infant Baptism."[35] In fact, the Commission goes as far as to suggest the possibility that 'believe into' might imply the exercising of faith by infants and children, so that "even on the grounds of 'believers' Baptism,' there would be no hindrance to their being baptized into Christ."[36]

Further justification for infant baptism is sought in the Epistles and found in Colossians, 1 John and Ephesians; in each of these passages, the Commission concludes, "children are included in those who are addressed as 'the *saints* and the *faithful* in Christ Jesus.'" Acknowledging the realisation, as suggested by their reading of Romans 11, that children of Jewish proselytes born after the conversion of the parents were not baptized but remained "members of the 'Holy People' of the Covenant,"[37] the Report nonetheless suggests that corporate baptism in early Christianity is a given. Citing 1 Corinthians 7.14, it maintains:

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 628.
[34] Ibid., 629.
[35] Ibid., 631.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 635.

> we do not come across anywhere in the New Testament the idea that there are two classes of Christians, baptized Christians and born Christians, and nowhere in early Christianity do we find the idea that children born of Christian parents do not need Baptism. "Christians are made, not born". We are forced to conclude … that if "holy" does not refer to baptized children, the fact that they are "holy," that they are already within the Holy People, the New Israel, demands their Baptism.[38]

However, whilst the Commission is clearly advocating infant baptism in the belief that children of the baptized are welcome in the Covenant community, its members also regard this practice as an "anonymous baptism."[39] Such a baptism is, in their view, synonymous with the baptism of the disciples at the hands of John the Baptist, who, they suggest, "were baptised in the Name of the Coming One anonymously". Children "are disciples from the start, but it is not till they confess the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that they are brought to participate in the Lord's Supper."[40] On the one hand, this could suggest that the Commission was advocating a universal approach to baptism, especially when we consider that through all the discussion of infant baptism, emphasis is placed upon the call and election of God:

> Though Baptism calls for our personal response, it is not the Sacrament of our repentance, nor of our faith, but of God's adoption and His promise of the Spirit. In Baptism it is He who adds us to the Church which is the Body of Christ. In the New Covenant infants who are baptised learn to call on the Name of God because they have been baptised into the Name of the Lord and belong to Him.[41]

From an ecclesiological perspective, if theological stress is placed upon God's nature and agency, then an argument for universal baptism would not be inconsistent. On the other hand, however, whilst the Commission clearly understands infant baptism to be grounded upon the grace and promises of God, it also argues that the faith of the Christian community is of importance, with the expectation that children born to believing parents will be baptised into the community, the body of Christ, in order to be counted among the 'holy'. Further, far from assuming the wider community of society to be Christian, the Commission's stated desire to ensure that the practice of infant baptism is reserved exclusively for those who confess the Christian faith suggests a restricted practice, rather than an open custom.

For the Commission, the importance of the New Testament understanding of the Church as the body of Christ is crucial to baptismal theology, which, it asserted, "involves an

[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 629.
[40] Ibid., 628.
[41] Ibid., 629.

understanding of *the essentially corporate nature of the Church* as a community of love integrated by the act of the Spirit in Baptism."[42] It is the Spirit which

> operates by creating out of the old world a body (SOMA), the Body of Christ, the Church, as the sphere of the New Creation, the sphere where through the presence and power of the Spirit the mighty salvation-events of the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ are operative here and now in history. *The One Spirit operates in history through the One Body which is the Church.*[43]

For the Commission, the nature of the Church is closely bound up with soteriology, pneumatology and eschatology:

> this Body (SOMA) reaches out through the operation of the Spirit to the fullness (PLEROMA) of Christ, in which all the Messianic promises and God's eternal purposes of creation and redemption are fulfilled … That fulfilment (PLEROMA) of God's purpose is begun in the Church but it reaches out to all creation … At Pentecost it was fulfilled *intensively* in the formation of the Church, but it is fulfilled *extensively* through the mission of the Church at the ends of the earth and to the end of the ages.[44]

As the body of Christ, the purpose of the Church is bound up with the "ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation" and is, to some extent, "a kind of first-fruits of God's creatures."[45] The Church is a holy people because they have been grafted by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ,[46] and it is "enlarged as through Baptism God adds to the Church those whom He calls" through the "operation of the Spirit in Word and Sacrament."[47] Thus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, baptism is "our ingrafting or initiation into the risen Christ, into the new world of resurrection, into the new creation."[48] This process has already started. It is through this ingrafting "into Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit" that people, in baptism, "become members of His Body."[49] It would therefore appear that the Commission equated Christian initiation with the work of the Holy Spirit, whilst also asserting that baptism is the means by which people can 'become' members of the body of Christ, the Church.

This overview of the 1955 report exploring the New Testament Doctrine of Baptism and the Apostolic Church reveals many things about the Special Commission's understanding of baptism and the nature and purpose of the Church. Whilst the verbatim minutes of the

[42] Ibid., 613.
[43] Ibid., 618.
[44] Ibid., 619.
[45] Ibid., 639.
[46] Ibid., 635.
[47] Ibid., 619.
[48] Ibid., 647.
[49] Ibid., 626.

1955 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland could not be located, the minutes from 1956, along with minutes of the meetings of the Special Commission throughout 1954 and 1955, were available. From these it is apparent that the content of the 1955 report was deemed to be "provocative" and that criticism "was not slow in forthcoming."[50] Indeed, Torrance mentions that "the returns from the Presbyteries indicate that there [had] been a very considerable response throughout the whole church."[51] This he suggests is a consequence of the report's "strong stress upon neglected aspects of the whole question [of baptism]," which, he conceded, had "involved it without doubt in a certain lack of balance."[52] This he put down to the document's length: it was "fifty pages long," when really it "ought to have involved 150 pages."[53] There is no doubt that each report contained a great deal of condensed ideas and work, which was the result of months of toil extolled by the Special Commission.

Exploration of the Commission's minutes from 1954 onwards reveals a large, entirely male, Commission, all of whom took an active part in the preparation of the report. The minute shed light on the Commission's method of working. A recurrent feature in the minutes is the apportioning of work as papers are drafted and discussed. One example of this is in June 1954:

> The sections of the Outline "Baptism in the N.T" drafted by the Rev R Stuart Louden and the Rev D.F.S. Dick were apportioned as follows: Section 1. Prof. Black. Section 2. J. Strathearn McNab and Johnston R. McKay. Section 3. G.W.H. Louden and W.C.V. Smith. Section 4. R.S. Louden and H.C. Donaldson. Section 5. D.S. Dick and T.H. Keir. Section 6. Dr A.D. Galloway and R.S. Wallace. Section 7. Dr A. Allan McArthur and D.G.M. Mackay. Section 8. D.H.C. Read, J.B. Skelly and W. Roy Sanderson. Section 9. Prof D. Cairns and G.W.H. Loudon. Section 10. W. Barclay and J.A. McFadden.[54]

Each was required to prepare a paper, "which will draw attention to (1) the basis of the N.T. doctrine and its classical expression, and (2) any doubtful or debatable points, with the writer's own considered judgement on them."[55] Although there were often two or three men working on any given section, it was "not thought necessary for men working on the same section to do so in consultation with one another. Each should submit his own views."[56] It is evident from the minutes that all the members of the Special Commission took an active role in the deliberations and that diversity of opinions was encouraged.

[50] Torrance, verbatim minute of the General Assembly, 1956, 906.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Minute of the Special Commission on Baptism, 17th June 1954, 2.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

Nevertheless, there is a clear correlation between Torrance's theology outlined in chapter one and the reports of the Special Commission. In the 1955 report this expresses itself, for instance, in a strong aversion to sacramental dualism, of which, the report claims the New Testament is devoid. The report highlights the importance of the covenant, with baptism replacing circumcision, as well as emphasising the role of John the Baptist in transforming the Jewish rite into a Christian rite, as a consequence of the baptism of Jesus. Perhaps most significant, however, is the emphasis on the importance of the incarnation for a proper understanding of baptism, the stress upon and preference for the word *baptisma*, rather than *baptismos*, and the importance placed upon the vicarious sacrifice of Christ. All of these were key features in Torrance's baptismal theology.

Of course, these emphasises might not have been exclusive to Torrance but may also have been advocated by other scholars and members of the Special Commission. The evidence certainly suggests that a variety of voices helped resource the conclusions reached. For instance, there is evidence in the minutes of the January 1955 meeting that Torrance was not alone in advocating the importance of Jesus' whole life in respect to baptism and soteriology. Mr Smith and Mr G.W.H. Loudon submitted a paper entitled, 'The relation to Baptism of the Virgin Birth, Baptism, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus.'[57] Discussion of this paper revealed that "it was generally agreed that the N.T. outline intended the Birth, Baptism, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus to be taken together."[58] Consequently,

> it was agreed that when we speak of Baptismal incorporation into Christ we mean an ingrafting into the whole of Christ and a sharing in the whole of His incarnate experience, for atonement has to do with the His death and resurrection but also with His birth and the whole of His life.[59]

Support for this understanding was attributed, not to the Convener, but to William Manson, and reference was made to two of the latter's papers in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*.[60] Further, it is apparent that the Commission sometimes made decisions that were contrary to Torrance's theological understanding. A good example of this is the Commission's stated belief that baptism properly dates from Pentecost, which also coincides with the formation of the church. In contrast, as seen in chapter one, Torrance believed that the church was founded with creation, with the establishment of the one covenant of grace.

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[57] Minutes of the Special Commission on Baptism, 14th-17th January 1955, 2.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 3.
[60] Ibid. The Minute includes a reference to W. Manson, "The Norm of the Christian Life in the Synoptic Gospels" in S.J.T vol.3, 3 and "The Son of Man and History" in S.J.T vol.5, 113.

Thus, there was obviously a diversity of opinion that made itself evident in some of the internal tensions that will become apparent in the discussion of later reports.

Despite this evidence of disagreement, there are a number of indicators that confirm Torrance's influence. For example, the Commission's own minutes recorded that in some areas,

> the Commission has been greatly dependent on the work done by the Convener on the Old Testament background, and most members feel themselves unfitted to express any judgement on this material.[61]

Thus, whilst a panel was appointed to look over the papers, there is an acknowledgement of the Commission's debt to Torrance, which was followed up in December 1954 with a "long paper" read by the Convenor "on the Baptism of John, Proselyte Baptism, and Essene Baptism."[62] This seems to have been the first time in the context of the Commission's work that mention was made to *baptisma* and *baptismos* and to Torrance's belief that "Jesus' Baptism is closely associated with the *kerygma.*"[63] This section of the report was presumably based largely on his presentation. In addition, revisions and corrections by the Convenor are often noted. For example, in November 1954, it is recorded that "the Convenor undertook to revise the paper prepared by Professor Black on Section 1: John's Baptism – its meaning in relation to Christian Baptism."[64] And, whilst it is evident that it was the Rev D.F.S. Dick,[65] together with Mr Louden and Dr Lillie,[66] who were appointed to prepare linguistic notes for discussion of word-studies by the Commission, the minutes also record that in light of the discussions, their papers should be re-drafted by themselves, in order to record "the measure of agreement reached."[67] On one level, this is simply good practice. Yet, when it came to the controversial theology and interpretation of the word *baptisma,* although no dissent is recorded in the minutes I found, it is evident that there was at least one member of the Special Commission, namely James Barr, who criticised this hermeneutical approach, although it subsequently, nevertheless, was a dominant theme in the report.

In 1961, drawing upon the work of Albrecht Oepke, James Barr, who was was an active member of the Special Commission and was involved in the preparation of the report on

[61] Minute of the Special Commission on Baptism, 30th November 1954, 1.
[62] Minutes of the Special Commission on Baptism, 13th December 1954, 1.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Minutes of the Special Commission on Baptism, 16th November 1954.
[65] Minute of the Special Commission on Baptism, 4th October 1954, 1.
[66] Minutes of the Special Commission on Baptism, 16th November 1954.
[67] Ibid., 2.

the biblical doctrine of baptism, concluded that an "'act of God' is not part of the semantic value of the word"[68] and that "there is no linguistic ground for associating *baptisma* and *kyrgma"* as Torrance does.[69] By 1961, then he disagreed substantially with a key feature of the doctrine as it was portrayed in the 1955 report. This suggests that either he had changed his mind in the intervening years or that he had never agreed with it in the first place. Given that Barr was presenting these views in a book published in 1961, and that he states there were "numerous examples" in the 1955 Interim Report of the Special Commission "of the kind of misinterpretation of language" which his book criticized,"[70] the latter seems the more likely conclusion. Thus, despite disagreement, the views of Torrance, as Convenor of the Special Commission, seem to have held sway. Not only does this lend weight to the suggestion that much of the reports of the Commission were shaped by Torrance, but it also suggests that Torrance was interpreting material presented by other members of the Commission in order to express his own theology of baptism.

Regardless of the importance of Torrance's influence, the Special Commission produced a report in 1955 that was provocative. Whilst this was keen to affirm the continuity between the Old and the New Testaments, the Commission also argues, against Torrance, as noted above, that the Christian sacrament of baptism is an event (BAPTISMA) that had been commanded by Christ, but which in practice dates from the time of Pentecost, understood to be the beginning of the formation of the Church. As such, it was held that baptism is a 'Mystery' entrusted to the Church, which is a corporate community of love. The report emphasised the 'Oneness' of baptism, and the Church as 'One Body', and argued that universal baptism can be actualised only in this community. Thus, the Church is believed to be the sphere of the new creation, the place where the death and resurrection of Christ is worked out, and the place where the Spirit moves and stirs. Baptism is held to be the means by which others are initiated into this 'holy' people, whether as believing adults or as infant children of those already members of the Church. As the first fruits of God's new creation, in the power of the Spirit, the Church is called to reach out to the whole of creation. However, any enlargement of the Church is ultimately the result of God's agency, since it is God who calls and invites others into the Church. This position raises important questions about the relationship between election and membership, the place of faith and baptism in covenantal theology, the freedom and work of the Spirit in and through the

[68] James Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 141.
[69] Ibid., 142.
[70] Ibid., 141.

world and Church, and the relationship between the mission of the Church in the between times and the Kingdom of God.

The 1956 Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism

Having explored the New Testament Doctrine of Baptism and its place and practice within the Apostolic Church, the 1956 report of the Commission continued to probe some of the themes drawn out above, as it turned its attention to Baptism in the early Church. Here the Commission resumes the discussion regarding the influence of Judaism and the New Testament upon early Church teaching, as well as identifying the influence of Hellenism in the formative period. It also explores the various names of baptism, highlights some of the early rites, and lays out the Doctrine of Baptism in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, before finally offering an evaluation of the early Church Doctrine of Baptism. In this report, the Commission offers an appraisal that reveals both the lessons they consider the Church should learn from the apostolic/patristic period, as well as criticisms which might be levelled against the practices of this period. Both the lessons and criticisms reveal a great deal about the ecclesiology of the early Church and what the Commission deem to be important for the Church's understanding of itself and mission in the world.

At the beginning of the Commission's discussion of the early Church, reference is made to its development and growth, but at the same time it is acknowledged that it took time for scriptural material to be circulated and leadership to be established.[71] The Commission suggests that it was "towards the end of the second century that a tradition of sound doctrine based upon the Apostolic testimony could be attested," identifying as dangerous threats the "conservative elements in the Church" that "leaned towards Judaism," as well as the "influence of pagan mystery cults," which had resulted in the "speculative myths and rituals of gnostic sects."[72] It was, the Commission asserts, "with the aid of the New Testament and an established ministry," that the Church was able to "overcome the worst forms of corruption."[73] Indeed, the importance of the New Testament is the first chief lesson affirmed by the Commission, who maintain that "in the Fathers the doctrine of Baptism is grounded upon the whole teaching of the New Testament."[74] As "it is solidly based upon events of the Gospel recorded by the Evangelists, as upon the apostolic example found in Acts of the Apostles," the Commission suggests that "this means that

[71] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1956, 612.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 637.

together with the death and resurrection of Christ, His birth and His Baptism are alike given an integral and essential place in the interpretation of Baptism."[75] In fact, it is not just Jesus' birth and baptism that are important for the Commission, but also the whole of his life, as the second chief lesson demonstrates.

In its consideration of the second chief lesson, the report suggests that "in its doctrine of Baptism the Early Church took far greater account than we are accustomed to do of *the historical Jesus* and all the recorded events of His life."[76] As such, the Commission asks whether it is "perhaps the case that in our modern assimilation of Christianity to idealist conceptions, we have not given proper place to the historical Jesus in our doctrine of Baptism?"[77] This emphasis on the importance of the historical Jesus in relation to baptism is, in part, about the desire to follow the example of the Church Fathers and save the sacrament from becoming a "rite of timeless significance". The Commission believed that "it was because the death and resurrection were part of the whole life of an historical person of flesh and blood that Baptism was prevented from being transformed into a timeless mystery;" this, in their view, "distinguished Christian Baptism from the mystical rites of Hellenism."[78] From the discussion of the influence of the New Testament in the early Church offered in the first part of the report, it is evident that the whole life of Christ was believed to have ecclesiological significance. Thus, considering Origen, Cyprian and Irenaeus, the report suggests that the Church Fathers looked upon Jesus' own baptism as

> The beginning of the saving act whereby on the Cross He descended into hell and ascended again leading captivity captive, to pour out His Spirit in a mighty Baptism upon the Church.[79]

Attention is also drawn to Jesus' "Messianic anointing" with the Spirit, which the Commission affirms has "made the gift of the Spirit available for all who follow Him in faith and Baptism."[80] Therefore, in keeping with the theology of the Church as the Body of Christ, the significance of Baptism for the Church Fathers was to affirm that "the pouring out of the Spirit upon Him [Jesus] at His Baptism was for our sakes, that we might share in His birth and so enter into the new race of Adam of which He has become the Head."[81] This is all in keeping with the doctrine of the 'One Baptism,' which the report suggests is illustrated in the following ways:

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[75] Ibid., 637-638.
[76] Ibid., 638.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 616.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

> (a) Christian Baptism is the sign of our participation in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Christ the Head of the new race. (b) Christian Baptism is the sign of our participation in the Baptism of Christ on the Cross when water and blood flowed from His side and drenched Him on our behalf.[82]

Thus, baptism in the early church retained the soteriological importance which the first report had argued to be central to the New Testament understanding, and, at least in principle, maintained that one of the meanings of baptism was the remission of sins. Considering the "The Names of Baptism," the Commission draws on the writings of both Cyprian of Carthage and Augustine, emphasising the description of baptism as "the sacrament of the incarnation and passion" (Cyprian, Testim. 2.2), as well as its description by Augustine "in the Punic language of North Africa" as simply 'redemption' or 'salvation.'[83] In the early Church, the Report concludes, the oneness of Baptism is still connected with the unity of the one death, one body, and one Lord, with the implication that forgiveness and reconciliation are only available within the unique community that is the Church.

This is linked to the third chief lesson suggested by the Commission: the notion that "the Early Church held that Christ had constituted Baptism in His own Person as a sacrament of our sharing in His humanity."[84] Here the themes of union and communion with God are prominent, drawing initially upon the theology of Irenaeus, who the Commission suggests is "the first great Biblical theologian after the Apostles, who most helps us to understand the development of baptismal doctrine in the Early Church."[85] The report suggests that Irenaeus' doctrine of baptism was based upon the teaching of both Paul and John, combining

> (a) the Johannine doctrine of the Word with the Pauline doctrine of the Spirit, (b) the Pauline doctrine of the new Adam, and the Synoptic and Johannine doctrine of the birth of Christ and of our new birth in Him, and (c) the Pauline emphasis upon reconciliation through the death of Christ, the Johannine emphasis upon Incarnation, and the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews of the atoning obedience of the Incarnate Son.[86]

As a result, the Christological and soteriological focus upon incarnation, obedience, and descent, not only overcomes the dualism of the gnostic heresies of which the Commission

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 625.
[84] Ibid., 638.
[85] Ibid., 617.
[86] Ibid.

was so fearful, but offers a way for "estranged humanity" to be "healed and restored to union and communion with God."[87] Indeed, the report affirms that

> baptism is the sacrament in which we [Christians] put off the old humanity and put on the new humanity of Christ, and so share in His birth, His Baptism, His life, His death and His resurrection, all of which He undertook for our sakes.[88]

This theme of taking on flesh had been mentioned earlier in the report, when it highlighted that the sharing of the baptized in the pattern of Christ's humanity was also "a favourite theme for Athanasius," who believed that through our incorporation into Christ, humanity is "given to share in His incorruptible and durable humanity. Christ Himself is thus the source of our new humanity" (*Contra Arianos* 1.12.51; 2.21.69; 2.22.76).[89] Further, by focussing upon the birth of Christ as the way in which God begins to sanctify humanity, the report suggests that "we are to understand our baptismal initiation into Christ as being born together with Him, in order that we may also share in His death and resurrection."[90] The Commission then quotes Augustine to demonstrate this point:

> Let us understand that our Head is the very source of grace; from Him grace flows into all His members, according to the capacity of each. Every man who receives the faith is made a Christian by the very same grace whereby this Man, from the very first moment of His existence, was constituted Christ. We are born again of the same Spirit by whose power He was born; we receive the remission of our sins from the same Spirit who preserved Him from sin of any kind (*De praedestinatione sanctorum* 15.31).[91]

Therefore, in and through Christ's life and humanity, the report affirms that the early Church Fathers believed that baptism was the means whereby sinful men and women could be forgiven, be born again of the Spirit and included in the Body of Christ, the Church. Furthermore, by highlighting the early Church belief in baptism as the 'washing of regeneration' (ANAGENNESIS and PALINGENESIA), the report emphasises that the rebirth that is brought about "applies first of all to Christ Himself, to His birth and to His Baptism," for "Christ is the One in whom the renewal or PALINGENESIA of our humanity has already taken place."[92] Thus, the unity of the birth, baptism, passion, and resurrection of Christ, as expressed in the 1955 report, are vital to the doctrine of baptism,[93] with the incarnation proving crucial to the early Church's theology of infant baptism.

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., 638.
[89] Ibid., 636.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 623.
[93] Ibid., 635.

The fourth chief lesson refers to the doctrine of infant baptism in the early Church, with the Commission affirming that it teaches us that "infant Baptism must be founded upon the birth of Christ as well as upon His death and resurrection."[94] In an approach similar to that taken in the 1955 report, the Commission supports infant baptism, arguing that "there is no evidence anywhere in the Early Church to suggest that infant Baptism was not apostolic practice from the very start."[95] However, whilst the Covenant is mentioned within the section dealing with baptism as the seal of the Spirit,[96] it is the incarnation, and specifically the virgin birth, that appears to be offered as the main justification for infant baptism. In fact, the Commission maintains that "it is highly significant that [the] first denial of infant Baptism rests upon a repudiation of the Christian belief that the Son of God was born of Mary."[97] This stems from the position that the "Virgin Birth is the sign of the fact that within our humanity God begins with sheer grace, bringing forth out of it a new humanity born of the Spirit, to learn obedience and grow in wisdom and grace." As such, "infant baptism is to be understood in conformity with the acts of God in the birth and life of Jesus."[98] For that reason, Augustine believed that conversion must not become the objective reference of baptism, but affirmed instead that "in baptizing infants, the sacrament of regeneration comes first, and if they shall preserve Christian piety, conversion will follow in the heart, the sign of which preceded in the body" (*de bapt*. 1.5.24).[99] This builds on an earlier discussion of the theology of Irenaeus, where it is proposed that infant baptism cannot be considered "apart from the life and growth of the believer in Christ … [for] … it is a growth within the saving power of the Word taught and preached to us. Thus infant Baptism and faith belong together."[100] The importance of embedding baptism in a process of "growing and maturing" is affirmed when looking at the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, and the words of Athanasius who states that a child brought forward for baptism must be "brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (*Apost. Const*. 4.11; 6.15; 8.10; cf. 8.13.15), and therefore has to "enter into its inheritance by understanding and faith."[101] The concept of inheritance appears to be related to God's saving act displayed in the whole life of Jesus, and links in with the theme of a new race, allowing Irenaeus to affirm that

[94] Ibid., 639.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 623.
[97] Ibid., 640.
[98] Ibid., 639.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid., 618.
[101] Ibid., 633.

> God the Father of all who wrought the incarnation has manifested a new birth, that as by the former birth we inherited death, so by this birth we should inherit life ('Adv. Haer.,' 5.1.3).[102]

This leads the Commission to affirm that "Irenaeus does not conceive the atonement apart from the actual humanity of Christ … [but] sees in the birth and growth of Jesus a single and continuous act of the Spirit, and discovers in them the basis and the objective ground for infant Baptism."[103] As a result, following the logic of Irenaeus, it would appear that the baptism of infants into the inheritance shaped by God is an act of grace, which can begin at any point in a person's life because Christ lived as a human being and in doing so sanctified all ages:

> Being thirty years old He came to be baptized, possessing the full age of a Master … not despising or evading any condition of humanity nor setting aside in Himself the law which He had appointed for the human race, but sanctifying every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to Himself. For He came to save all by means of Himself, all, I say, who through Him are born again unto God … infants, and children, and boys and youths and old men. He therefore passed through every age becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness and submission; a youth for youths, thus sanctifying them for the Lord. Then at last He came on to death itself, that He might be "the first-born from the dead" and "that in all things He might have the pre-eminence, the Prince of Life, existing before all and going before all ('*Adv. Haer*.,' 2.22.4).

Infant baptism is justified then, on the grounds not only of the virgin birth, but also of his very human birth and life experience, which, the Commission affirms, "belong to the mighty acts of God for our salvation." The Commission therefore holds that it is "proper to think of the Baptism and spiritual growth of … children in terms of them."[104] From an ecclesiological perspective, it is evident, then, that the baptism of infants was not intended to be viewed in an individualistic way, but in relation to the birth of Christ which was considered in the early Church to be an initiation into a new race, a new inheritance, a new life. Leo the Great, in his sermons on the nativity, demonstrates this point:

> the birth of Christ is the source of life for Christian folk and the birthday of the Head is the birthday of the body. Although every individual that is called has his own order and all the sons of the Church are separated from one another by intervals of time, yet as the entire body of the faithful, being born in the font of Baptism, is crucified with Christ in His passion, raised again in His resurrection, and placed at the Father's right hand in His ascension, so with Him are they born in this nativity (Serm. 26.2).[105]

[102] Ibid., 617.
[103] Ibid., 618.
[104] Ibid., 639.
[105] Ibid., 635.

Accordingly, from this perspective, the birth of the Church is related to the advent of Christ and the rite of baptism. The report also highlights the way in which the Church in the early period was likened to a Mother, particularly in the writings of Hippolytus (*De Christo et Antichr.* 61). The Church is said to show "motherhood by labouring and bringing forth children in Baptism through the power of the Word,"[106]and Christ, as signified by the child of the woman in Rev 12.1-6, is said to represent "the children begotten of the Church from age to age."[107] This leaves open the question of who can participate in and belong to such a community (do they need to profess faith), and also that of what makes somebody a Christian. If, as Tertullian believed, "Christians are made, not born," then how are they 'created' and what is the purpose of the Church in this process of labour, birth and safe delivery?

For the Commission, this leads to the fifth and final lesson to be learned from the early Church: "the serious concern manifested for catechetical instruction."[108] The report suggested that the instruction of "converts or proselytes before Baptism" was "one of the most important contributions of Judaism to the Christian Church,"[109] and that in the early Church "Baptism was the chief occasion for careful instruction in the Christian faith."[110]As such, the Commission believes that "the sacrament of Baptism came to be closely associated with the transmission of 'The rule of faith' or a short compendium of Christian doctrine."[111] Maintaining that Baptism was "enshrined in a whole life of teaching and worship, and was unthinkable apart from it," the Commission suggested that this accounted "to a very large extent for the amazing success of the Christian mission in the heathen world," and reckoned that a "recovery of this concern would mark a very great advance in [our] Church life and work to-day."[112] Clearly, teaching and instruction were and are important elements in the life of the Church and the early liturgical rites of baptism reveal elements that were important in the Christian formation and development of baptismal candidates. Recognising this, the Commission focused on four main documents in order to explore the doctrine of baptism in the early Church: *The Didache* (90-110 A.D.), Justin Martyr's *Apology I* (148-161 A.D.), Tertullian's, *On the Soldier's Chaplet* (c. 211 A.D.), and Hippolytus', *The Apostolic Tradition* (215-217 A.D.).

[106] Ibid., 633.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., 640.
[109] Ibid., 613.
[110] Ibid., 612.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 640.

Examining the documents from an ecclesiological perspective, certain themes emerge that are important when considering the nature and purpose of the Church in this time period. In *The Didache*, considered to be the oldest manual for catechetical instruction,[113] it is apparent that only the baptized were permitted to participate in the Eucharist:

> But let no one eat or drink of this Eucharistic thanksgiving, but they that have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord hath said: Give not that which is holy to the dogs (*Didache* 7, 9).

Evidently, there was a separation, a clear distinction, between those who were considered to be part of the Church and holy enough to receive the Eucharist and those who were not, with Baptism considered to be the means whereby this threshold could be crossed. The place of personal 'interrogation' in regards to an individual's faith is evident in Tertullian's *On the Soldier's Chaplet*, in which successful faith pledges are said to result in baptism, along with "the taste of milk and honey," indicating the baptized "rebirth and adoption into God's family."[114] In Justin Martyr's *Apology I*, the report argues, "the conception of Baptism as new birth and enlightenment involving forgiveness of sins is set in a context of the Word – of instruction, of learning, of faith and decision, prayer and fasting."[115] As well as the corporate nature and unity of worship and teaching, the Commission also points out that here too only the baptised share in the Lord's Supper; moreover, an ethical responsibility was placed upon the baptised, with baptism "immediately linked to the commandments of the Lord, and the newly enlightened [expected] to live in obedience to Christ … his life from week to week involves a life of Christian love in the midst of the fellowship."[116] It would, therefore, appear that candidates for baptism had to believe certain things, behave in a particular way, and only then could they fully belong, through baptism, in the community of the Church. This, suggest the members of the Commission, is perhaps best illustrated by Hippolytus in *The Apostolic Tradition.*

From the outset of this document, the report emphasises that it is unlikely that Hippolytus' rite is 'apostolic'. Nevertheless, the Commission does affirm that "its essential elements give a fair representation of late second century rites,"[117] and reveals a great deal about the ecclesiology of the time. Thus, whilst the period of instruction for a catechumen was about three years, it is asserted that "if a man be earnest and persevere well in the matter [let him

[113] Ibid., 626.
[114] Ibid., 627.
[115] Ibid., 626.
[116] Ibid., 627.
[117] Ibid.

be received] because it is not time that is judged but conduct."[118] After instruction, "the catechumens [were to] pray by themselves apart from the faithful" and were not permitted to "give the kiss of peace" after the prayer, "for their kiss is not yet pure."[119] Those who were 'set apart' for baptism were to have their lives examined, in order to discern "whether they lived piously while catechumens, whether they 'honoured the widows,' whether they visited the sick, whether they have fulfilled every good work.[120] It was only after exorcisms, fasting, instruction, vigil, the affirmation of faith in the Trinitarian God, baptism, and the anointment of oil and laying on of hands, that the baptised were considered pure and allowed to pray with the faithful and exchange the kiss of peace;[121] with the baptismal rite finally concluding with the Eucharist. Lastly, in the belief that it was the Word and Spirit who enabled the baptised to keep the commandments, those who failed to do so were "to be put out of the Church" (*Comm. On Dan.* 1.17.44).[122]

From this brief overview of the documents discussed in the report, it is evident that baptism in the early Church was considered by the Commission to be a rite whereby catechumens could be reborn, purified, and adopted into the family of God. All of this was dependant upon the intention and behaviour of the candidates, both pre- and post- baptism, with obedience to the commandments of God and 'right' living being paramount. Thus, in order to belong to this holy group of people, individuals had to turn their back on evil, assent to faith in God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and be assured of their forgiveness live in such a way as to glorify God. Consequently, the early rites present baptism as a high calling, demanding much from the candidates, and placing great responsibility, not only upon the catechumens, but also upon the Church of the baptised who were seeking to preach and teach in all their living. Faith was clearly a vital aspect of the initiatory rite of baptism, and belonging to the Church was dependent upon it. Yet, although the Commission does not remark on this, the focus upon right behaviour and conduct raises questions about the inner and outer workings of God's grace in the process of adoption, rebirth and transformation, particularly when considering the nature of God's love, which might be said to precede condition and requirements. In this regard, the chief criticisms which the Commission raised against the early church and found at the end of the 1956 report reveal a changing ecclesiological picture.

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 628.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid., 628-629.
[122] Ibid., 631.

Prior to exploring their four chief criticisms, the Commission offers a summary of the Church of Scotland's baptismal ecclesiology. This is prefaced by the assertion that "the Biblical conception of Baptism was not preserved unaltered in the Early Church" and could be "illustrated by contrasting the conception of salvation in the Early Church with that which we find in the New Testament."[123] Here the emphasis is upon the agency of God working in Jesus Christ to bring about "acts of reconciliation and justification;" with Christ now ascended, the Church is the "sphere on earth where Christ crucified, risen, and clothed with power is actively present among men through His Word and Spirit."[124] The Commission highlights the tension between the 'now, but not yet' of salvation history, affirming that the Church lives between the first and second advent of Christ, with its life in Christ directed "to the day when He [Christ] will come to make all things new and consummate His Kingdom."[125] Yet, even with this eschatological focus, the Commission believes that "the Church lives within the boundaries of the new age," because "in the resurrection of Jesus Christ … the decisive event that has entirely altered the whole course of history has taken place."[126] As a result, the Commission suggests that through the outpouring of Christ's "Spirit of promise upon the Church," Jesus has "not only sealed it as His own, but has given it a foretaste of the new life of resurrection." Further, Jesus has "empowered the Church and sent it out to proclaim the Gospel to the nations of the earth," all the while postponing his second advent "in order to give the nation time to repent and believe the Gospel."[127] Indeed, in the report's discussion of the names given to baptism, the Commission had highlighted the fact that baptism can mean both 'illumination,' and 'consecration,' suggesting that the former meaning is focused on the notion of discipleship,[128] whilst the latter, reflecting the use of the Greek word TELEIOSIS, "carries with it the notion of setting apart for a sanctified purpose, and can often mean 'ordination'."[129]

From this it is evident that the Church, having been sealed, given a foretaste of new life and empowered to preach the good news, has a future-focussed mission, that begins in the here and now; with the once and for all nature of God's saving agency in Christ supreme. However, with the emphasis placed upon the New Testament perspective of salvation, the

[123] Ibid., 640.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 640-641.
[128] Ibid., 622.
[129] Ibid., 625.

Commission suggest that in the early Church this view was lost,[130] and salvation came "to be interpreted in terms of spiritual processes at work in men and history."[131] Consequently, the Commission's first chief criticism is that "from very early times in the history of the Church there was a marked failure to interpret Baptism in terms of the New Testament doctrine of justification."[132] It is the finished and complete work of God in Christ which has enabled humanity to "enter into a fellowship of righteousness … by sharing in His [Christ's] new humanity through the work of the Spirit,"[133] and which results in forgiveness, once and for all, negating the need for further justification. In particular, the report maintains that despite doctrinal adherence to the concept of justification by many of the Church Fathers, Augustine developed ideas that "often replace or distort the Biblical."[134] In particularly, following Augustine, the belief that only past sins were dealt with in baptism began to abound, with the consequence that future justification in the early Church was believed to be brought about "through a process of transformation in which we co-operate with healing grace to achieve a new righteousness which will be pleasing to God."[135] Therefore, the report suggests in the patristic era baptism became "only the initiation of a sacramental process," which had "to be supplemented by other sacramental means of grace wherein the believer co-operate[d] in a penitential discipline to effect the removal of post-baptismal sin."[136] The report believes that this represented a "lapse from the Pauline understanding of the fall of man and of original sin."[137] Thus, whilst the Commission believe that Irenaeus was faithful to the doctrine of justification as found in the New Testament, it suggests that in the theology of Tertullian, the notion of original sin as inherited pollution had already resulted in the interpretation of baptismal justification as "the importing of a physical and metaphysical change into human nature and the working out of that change in a 'saving discipline.'"[138] Likewise, whilst the report affirms that Origen "stands far closer to the Biblical teaching," it also regrets that his eschatological perspective is translated "into inward spiritual and moral terms."[139]

[130] Ibid., 641.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., 642.
[139] Ibid.

The Commission attributed many aspects of this perceived distortion, not only to a move away from the New Testament, but also to the Church's changed status from a movement to an institution:

> More and more, as the Church masters the civilised world, and at the same time settles down in it as an established institution, the emphasis shifts from the mighty acts of God in Christ to what goes on in the human soul.[140]

Through the development of the doctrine of the sacraments, the Church came to be "looked upon as the sacramental institution dispensing means of grace to the penitent and needy," and grace was seen as "the healing medicine poured out like oil into the wounds of humanity."[141] As a result, the notion that baptism was a process of the inward transformation of the soul, a focus on the meaning of grace, and questions about the efficacy of the rite all became prominent during this period. These developments were called into question by the Commission.

The second chief criticism pertains to the early Church's understanding of the Spirit, which, the report suggests, in this period "was dissociated from the Person of Christ and came to be thought as a 'pneumatic potency.'"[142] Quoting from Serapion's prayer (*Prayers* 2.7) for the sanctification of the baptismal water, the report demonstrates the development of an increasingly close – and not necessarily helpful – relationship between pneumatology and grace:

> See now from heaven and look upon these waters and fill them with Holy Spirit. Let Thine ineffable Word come to be in them and transform their energy and cause them to be generative, being filled with Thy grace in order that the mystery which is now being celebrated may not be found in vain those that are being regenerated, but may fill all those that descend and are baptized with the divine grace.[143]

Baptism had come to be viewed as sacramentally efficacious through the work of the Spirit, a view which the report criticised as "a 'semi-magical' conception of the union of the Spirit with water to effect a baptismal regeneration of quite an unbiblical sort."[144] This was in keeping with the report's criticism of Hellenism and the way in which in that context the seal and grace of the Spirit had acquired "magical potency," which the Commission believed was "a view not altogether unlike some popular misconceptions of Baptism today."[145]

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[140] Ibid., 641.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., 642.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid., 619.

The latter led directly to the third chief criticism regarding the faith, in which the Commission affirmed that there had been a "serious deterioration from the teaching of the New Testament" regarding "the conception of grace."[146] Whilst praising Augustine for the "magnificent service" he had offered the Church in "recovering much of the evangelical emphasis of the New Testament," the report comments that he made "justification pass into sanctification, interpreting it as a process which transforms the sinner into a saint."[147] Thus, the Commission criticises not only Augustine's belief that "Baptism effects the wiping out only of original sin and of past sins,"[148] but also the idea that in baptism the "baptized person is given (in chrismation) the Holy Spirit who pours out the love of God into his heart … that heal the wounds caused by sin and imparts to man the will with which to fulfil the law and so to achieve justification."[149] The reasons for this criticism were bound up with Augustine's espousal of what the Commission believed to be a false view of justification, which had led him to "conform to the emphasis upon salvation through penitential discipline."[150] This had resulted in baptism's being viewed as a means of grace, an understanding which carried with it "a very subtle form of self-justification."[151] Therefore, from an ecclesiological perspective, the report implies that through the sacraments, the Church had become a dispenser of indwelling grace, thus losing sight of the once and for all nature of the work of God in Jesus Christ and the salvation that comes from God alone.

This led to the fourth and final chief criticism, focused upon what the Commission described as the "very significant alteration in perspective and emphasis from the objective to the subjective."[152] On the basis of this understanding – that the importance of baptism had come to be placed upon the forgiveness of past sins, – the Commission argued "the baptized were forced to concentrate upon the salvation of their souls."[153] The result of this was the loss of the eschatologically "positive and future import" of baptism, in order to provide a system which would "impart grace for every need." For "common people," this resulted in the "evolution of a whole sacramental discipline," whilst for a select group this "meant devotion to a monastic life … a 'second Baptism'."[154] The Commission maintained that

[146] Ibid., 642.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid., 643.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.

> the effect of this change from the objective to the subjective was the focusing of the attention upon the actual rites so that they lost their kerygmatic character as sacraments of the historico-redemptive activity of God in Christ.[155]

As a result of Augustine's doctrinal concept of 'irresistible grace,' the "centre of gravity was shifted from Christ Himself … to the rites as efficacious in themselves,"[156] leading to a cause and effect understanding of the sacraments.[157] Ecclesiologically, this shifted the focus from Christ to the distributor of the rites, the Church, which was now understood as the 'Ark of Salvation'.[158] The Commission complained that this gave rise to

> two Roman doctrines which the Reformed Church can only regard as heresies: (1) the conception of "created grace," and (2) the conception of "baptismal regeneration *ex opere operato.*"[159]

Finally, the report emphasised the Commission's belief that "sealing in Baptism involves a relation of promise," and is therefore bound up with Word and Spirit in such a way that "grace [is unable to] be separated from the person of Christ Himself."[160] In the view of the Commission, as Christendom took root and the Church became an established institution, anchored in public life, these four points of criticism came to be prominent and recurrent features in the theology of the Roman Catholic Church. On this basis, the Commission moved on in their next report to explore ecclesiology in the Medieval Church and the reasons for and the outcome of the Reformation, specifically in relation to baptism.

Once again the Special Commission produced a lengthy report that emphasised the importance of the New Testament and contained many ideas that not only resemble Torrance's theology but were, in turn, to prove controversial. This led to questions regarding the balance of replies received from Presbytery, in relation to favourable and unfavourable responses,[161] as well as questions related to the composition of the Commission.[162] The Convener responded by stating that "10 Presbyteries quite definitely gave their general disapproval, 18 quite definitely gave their approval, and the others did as we asked them to do."[163] In respect to the composition of the Commission, whilst there was the admission by Torrance that he was "sorry to say that some of those holding

[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid., 644.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid., 641.
[159] Ibid., 644.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Verbatim minutes from the General Assembly, 1956, 916.
[162] Verbatim minutes from the General Assembly, 1956, 917.
[163] Ibid.

different views … were asked to come on the Commission and they declined,"[164] a member of the Commission, the Rev. Donn, gave assurance to the Assembly that "it [the Special Commission] is fully representative of almost every theological point of view within the Church."[165] Indeed, Torrance went as far as to suggest that "there [was] an astonishing measure of agreement from widely divergent views."[166] That may have been so, but it became apparent that agreement in the General Assembly was not going to be forthcoming. Whilst some ministers and elders could suggest that "today you have before you a report which is *ecclesia semper reformanda*, seeking to reform itself and renew itself in obedience to God's Word and the experience of the Church,"[167] there were others who believed that the report was "not Biblical study or Biblical theology but Biblical obscurantism,"[168] and, as Biblical critics, urged honesty, rather than imposing "theological presuppositions."[169] Further correspondence from Presbyteries following the 1955 report had convinced the Special Commission that "the greatest cause of misunderstanding seems to be that the Commission's approach to Scripture is unfamiliar and requires to be more fully explained."[170] Much of this misunderstanding, I would suggest, centred around the Commission's emphasis upon the objective, Christocentric nature of baptism, which seemed confused about the meaning of grace and unclear about the place of faith; not least in relation to infant baptism.

As mentioned above, Torrance's influence is particularly noticeable in this report. Some passages in it could be quoted almost verbatim from his own baptismal theology. This is particularly apparent in the criticism of the idea of baptism as a "timeless rite," but can also been seen in the Commission's conjecture that baptism is not a process, but rather complete in itself. In addition, reference to the "One Baptism" and discussion of the soteriological implications of union and communion with God is reminiscent of Torrance's emphasis upon the *homoousion.* In addition, when the early church fathers are discussed there are echoes of Torrance's belief that there is "no finer teaching on baptism to be found in the whole early Church than that which has come down to us from Irenaeus." Baker suggests that Torrance "believe[d] that Irenaeus offered the first theology of baptism in the

[164] Verbatim minutes from the General Assembly, 1956, 918.
[165] Ibid., 930.
[166] Ibid., 918.
[167] Ibid., 923.
[168] Ibid., 925.
[169] Ibid., 926.
[170] Minutes of the meeting of the Special Commission on Baptism, 4th November 1955. 1.

early church."[171] Further, he highlights that Torrance drew greatly upon Irenaeus' baptismal theology, not least "his theology of baptism as the sacrament of the vicarious obedience of Christ the Servant-Son,"[172] and proposed that in Torrance's theology, "infant baptism finds its 'objective foundation' in Christ's birth and growth in wisdom and grace."[173] This was a strong element of the fourth chief lesson presented by the Commission, if not the whole report, as they proposed that infant baptism was founded on the birth of Christ. Thus, instead of justifying the practise of infant baptism by appealing to Reformed arguments from Covenant theology, the Commission adopted an incarnational justification, with little reference to covenant. This created a confused report, not least when this was placed alongside what the Commission said about the praxis and teaching of the early church and the importance of faith and catechetical instruction. Taking the incarnational model to its logical conclusion, if Christ has sanctified all ages, then universalism is a possibility and all people could and potential should be baptised. Yet, that is not what the reports suggests.

Whilst this was not discussed in great detail at the 1956 General Assembly, the issues of covenant, faith and regeneration were evident in the report and was raised by the Convener:

> I believe that the whole notion of the Covenant needs to be recast, not so much in judicial and legal terms but in terms of the living Jesus Christ, and I believe that the whole doctrine of election needs to be recast, not in terms of determinism, as though we were automata, but in terms of election that this man stands upon his feet that he might give to God the love of his heart and the response of his faith. And yet we have to recover both the Covenant and the true doctrine of election in such a way that we lay the emphasis where the Christian faith does, in the saving God in Jesus Christ.[174]

To that end, Torrance proceeded to assure the General Assembly that the Commission were "determined to give faith its true place" in respect to the relationship between sacraments and faith,[175] but reiterated the belief that "in regard to baptismal regeneration," the Commission "has sought and it still seeks and will seek to turn the attention of the Church away from the rites themselves to Jesus Christ."[176] It was unsurprising then in 1957 to find that the Commission's report reiterated the criticisms found at the end of the 1956

[171] Matthew Baker, "The place of St Irenaeus of Lyons in historical and dogmatic theology according to T.F.Torrance," in *Participatio*: *The Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, Vol.2, 2010, 31.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid., 32.
[174] Verbatim minutes from the General Assembly, 1956, 912.
[175] Ibid., 913.
[176] Ibid.

report and reinforced the centrality of Christ, the objective nature of baptism, and called into question the conception of grace and the traditional definition of baptism as a sacrament.

The 1957 Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism

The 1957 Interim Report of the Commission is predominantly concerned with Baptism in the Medieval Church (looking at the Augustinian tradition, the medieval synthesis, Thomas Aquinas and the Schoolmen, and the official Roman doctrine), and Baptism in the Churches of the Reformation, with a specific exploration of the Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican traditions. Since this thesis is concerned with the baptismal policy of the Church of Scotland, this section will principally explore the Commission's discussion of baptism in the Reformed tradition, focussing upon the sacramental theology of John Calvin, in order to discern the reasons for the Reformation of baptismal theology and practice, the ways in which it altered sacramental understanding, and the influence it had upon baptismal policy and ecclesiology.

The report begins by suggesting that religion in the medieval period was characterised by "allegorical ideas and symbolism."[177] It makes particular reference to the way "God has created the Church as a sacramental organism through which the grace poured out in the Incarnation continues to operate for the salvation of the world."[178] In this, it again acknowledges the influence of Augustine, suggesting that in order to "understand the medieval development and the Reformation doctrine of Baptism, it is important that we should examine and assess the basic Augustinian tradition."[179] It endeavours to do this by exploring (a) word and sacrament, (b) the relationship between a sign and the thing signified, and (c) the effect and use of the sacraments. From this, certain key ecclesiological themes emerge.

Firstly, Augustine's definition of a sacrament as an "outward and visible sign pointing to inward and invisible grace,"[180] based upon the relationship between audible sign (the Word) and visible sign (the Sacrament), demonstrates the way that the fixed ordinances are closely bound up with and "inseparably embedded in an ecclesiastical institution."[181] The

[177] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1957, 650.
[178] Ibid., 651.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid., 652.
[181] Ibid., 651.

report suggests, however, that the theologians of the Medieval Church, unlike the Reformers, believed that the sacraments "derive[d] their efficacy from the Church," rather than "vice versa."[182] Secondly, noting the medieval importance of symbols and ritual acts, the Commission maintains that in this period the action and presence of Christ within the sacrament was lost, so that "Christ tended to disappear behind the outward symbols."[183] As a result, the Church was considered to be the "effective agent dispensing the sacraments," and the sacraments were the "means whereby Christ's saving institution, the Church, functioned in the world."[184] Thirdly, the report, in discussing the effect and use of the sacraments in Augustine's theology, recognises that baptism was the means by which God's grace was given. In the middle ages, it affirms, baptism came to be viewed as only effective within the Church, and was considered the sacrament "whereby men were united with the Church, outside of which there was no salvation."[185] The focus upon the outward and practical administration of baptism within the institution of the Church came to be epitomised in the *Decree of Gratian* (1144). This the Commission regarded "as one of the most significant stages in the history of the doctrine of Baptism in the West," believing that it was "a warning to all who are more concerned with the practical and legal definitions of baptismal administration than with the evangelical doctrine and the spiritual content of Baptism."[186]As the report progresses, the juridical and mystical teaching that emerged from the Augustinian tradition (prominent in the teaching of Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas), reveals something of the ecclesiology that arose from the tradition and became the official doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Turning to the *Roman Catechism* (1566), the Commission notes its teaching that "holy Baptism holds the first place of all the sacraments, because it is the door of spiritual life: for through it we are made members of Christ and of His Body the Church."[187] Yet, whilst the report suggests that this process of becoming a member is effected in baptism because it "contains, causes, and confers grace *ex opere operato* in those who rightly receive it," it also notes that the Roman Catholic Church believes that baptism "is neither the final nor the efficient cause of justification."[188] Instead, it suggests, baptism is believed by Roman Catholics to be "the means whereby we are translated out of the state of original sin into

[182] Ibid., 652.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid., 654.
[187] Ibid., 662.
[188] Ibid.

the state of grace," thus "removing any obstacle to entry into heaven."[189] Therefore, as observed above, salvation is dependent upon the recipient of baptism remaining within the Roman Catholic Church and participating in the other sacraments. Only in this way can the baptised remain in a state of grace, and be absolved from post-baptismal sin; for the Roman Church was (or, in the Commission's view, claimed to be) "the sole dispenser of grace,"[190] and recognised that baptism was "the spiritual seal which cannot be lost."[191]

Consequently, the Commission argues, one of the costs of the Roman doctrine was a depreciation of baptism through the emphasis on the necessity of participation in other sacraments, and particularly, as a result of the "introduction of confirmation as a separate sacrament."[192] Moreover, the increase in the number of sacraments, together with the departure from the laying on of hands as part of the baptismal ritual, resulted in "great laxity in the instruction of children," partly because people regarded "the symbolic ceremonies of the Church as automatically bringing with them the graces they represented."[193] Thus, whilst the report notes that the Medieval Church regarded itself as a 'mother,' charged with the responsibility of nurturing and instructing, in order to foster the growth of faith (which was ultimately dependent upon personal response and the promise of the Spirit),[194] it concluded that in this period the early Church's emphasis on the importance of teaching had been at least diluted, if not entirely abandoned. In addition, during the discussion of the Scholastic doctrine of Baptism, the Commission notes that Thomas "did not demand a specific act of confession" prior to the administration of the sacraments, suggesting that "this desire to be as lenient as possible in baptismal requirements and administration opened the way for abuse by clergy and laity alike."[195] This failure in catechetical practice, together with the seeming neglect or rejection of the evangelical and spiritual content of baptism, the Church's insistence that it was the only dispenser of grace and its belief that outwith her presence there could be no salvation, were all contributory factors to the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The Reformation marked a turning point in both ecclesiological and sacramental understanding.

As the Commission saw it, at the heart of the Reformation was a desire to return to the centrality of the Word of God, Jesus Christ. This, led to a "break away from the Latin

[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid., 663.
[191] Ibid., 662.
[192] Ibid., 653.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid., 661.

conception of God and nature" and a return to "the Living God of the Bible, who actively intervenes in the affairs of men."[196] This was a result of the influence of Luther, who "came more and more to lay emphasis upon the commanding, promising and creative Word of God in Baptism," as opposed to the "false objectivity of the *opus operatum* of the Roman Church."[197] For Luther, the Commission suggested, the concept of Word held together the idea of covenant and promise. As a result, the person and work of Jesus became the main focus of the Reformer's thinking, resulting in an ecclesiology that understood Christ as dwelling "in the midst of His Church on earth, making it His Body." It was "through His Church, by His Word and Spirit, [that] the Gospel of forgiveness is freely proclaimed to all men, and is effective for their salvation.[198] Therefore, rejecting the Roman Church's belief that it alone was "a sacramental organism … the extension of the Incarnation, [and] the prolongation of the Atonement," with "exclusive possession of the means of grace," the Reformers, along with the Commission, believed that "the Church is, above all, the People of God." [199] It is amongst this community of the faithful that the Word of God is preached and the sacraments dispensed, through which "Christ graciously adopts as members of His Body all who believe."[200] For Luther, the Commission argued, Baptism was no longer simply associated with the "removal of original sin," but instead concerned with "the whole forward direction of new life in Christ," offering forgiveness and justification for the whole of life.[201] In the Commission's reading of Reformation theology, the idea of membership and adoption, the importance of the gathered community, and its relationship with God, and the role of the sacraments within the life of the body, are all prominent themes. However, and unsurprisingly, it is John Calvin's discussion of the sacraments and teaching on baptism, as presented in the *Institutes* and other selected writings, which the Commission see as key to understanding the Reformed understanding of baptism.

The Commission believed that "the doctrine of union with Christ is a central conception" in the theology of Calvin. Calvin sees the sacraments as a means of achieving this, and as a result, for him, "the place of the sacraments is within the Church, and their function is to create and nourish our union with Christ in faith and life."[202] The relationship between baptism and the Covenant is used by Calvin to emphasise the personal union with Christ,

[196] Ibid., 663-664.
[197] Ibid., 670.
[198] Ibid., 664.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid., 665.
[202] Ibid., 671.

and this in turn reveals an ecclesiology that describes both the function of the sacrament and the nature of the Church. The Commission highlights the belief within Reformed thinking that baptism is a "sacrament of admission or incorporation:"[203] "because Christ is the Head and Centre of a new humanity which is taken up into the Covenant and constituted His Body, to be baptized into Christ is to be baptized into membership of His Body which is the Church."[204] The report also acknowledges the Reformed conviction that circumcision was superseded by baptism, as the Old Covenant gave way to the New, but emphasises that the content of the covenantal promise nonetheless remained unchanged. Thus, quoting Calvin, they suggest that from the beginning the Covenant testified to "God's 'paternal kindness' and His desire to adopt men into the Household and Family of God."[205] Therefore, they suggest, baptism is considered by Calvin to be an "initiatory sign by which we are admitted to the fellowship of the Church, that being ingrafted into Christ we may be accounted the children of God" (*Inst*. IV. xv. 1).[206] This corresponds to the Commission's notion that the sacrament is a corporate, rather than a private affair. Moreover, the Commission emphasise that within the covenant of grace, the sacraments "are used by God to initiate and maintain us in this covenanted fellowship" and that they "function only within the sphere of God's revealing and reconciling activity."[207] Calvin, who in his later career held a strongly Trinitarian conception of God, believed that "Baptism should be celebrated in the midst of the faithful," because it "is essentially the sacrament of what Christ has done for the Church, and must be celebrated as a corporate sacrament."[208] The emphasis here is on the Word preached and proclaimed: for Calvin the benefits of the covenant are preserved when "the Word precedes" and the Church "embraces the sign as a testimony and pledge of grace; for as God binds Himself to keep the promise given to us, so the consent of faith and of obedience is demanded of us (*Comm. on Gen*. xvii. 9)."[209]

Whilst faith and obedience are important to Calvin, especially in the instance of adults, the passivity of human beings in the covenant of grace is paramount, making a response required "only from those whose age makes them capable of both."[210] Therefore, in the case of infants, justification for baptism is grounded, not only in the command of Christ to

[203] Ibid., 676.
[204] Ibid., 677.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid., 671.
[208] Ibid., 683.
[209] Ibid., 677.
[210] Ibid.

baptise (a position shared by Luther, the Anglican tradition, and also Zwingli, although the Commission does not say so), but also – and even primarily – in the biblical examples of promise, circumcision and seal within the "covenanted Fatherhood of God,"[211] found especially in the Old Testament. Ecclesiologically, Calvin affirms that "the children of the godly are born the children of the Church, and they are accounted members of Christ from the womb," part of "the household of the kingdom of God."[212] Therefore, children as well as adults are sanctified by Christ's Incarnation, since for Calvin Christ is the "'mirror of election'." That is, in sharing our humanity, Jesus has sanctified all ages, and in his 'standing in' for children, even in their own eventual response of faith, "they rely not only their own obedience, but, 'like little children,' on the obedience Christ has made on their behalf."[213] There is, however, something special about being born into the covenantal family. Calvin develops this theme by building upon the idea of a "holy seed." Drawing on 1 Corinthians 7.14, he holds that "the special privilege to children of the faithful flows from the blessing of the Covenant, by the intervention of which the curse of nature is removed in such a way that those who were unholy by nature are consecrated to God by grace."[214] Furthermore, referencing Ephesians 5.26, Calvin can affirm that

> If by Baptism Christ intends to attest the ablution by which He cleanses His Church, it would seem not to be equitable to deny this attestation to infants, who are justly deemed part of the Church, seeing they are called heirs of the heavenly kingdom."[215]

Moreover, the Commission recognise the corporate nature of baptism in Reformed theology, highlighting Calvin's view that, "regeneration is adoption into the family and household of God," and that "children are not adopted on the ground of Baptism: Baptism is given on the ground of adoption."[216] Therefore, baptism is "the sign and seal of the fact that already within the household of faith God has adopted an attitude toward our children long before they can adopt an attitude toward Him."[217] As a result, the Commission concludes that whilst faith is a prerequisite for adult baptism, the passive nature of infant baptism and the love of God are also a clear representation of the fact that God's promise precedes all faith.[218] This view was similar to that held by Luther, who, as the Commission observes, believed that baptism and faith were inseparable. Indeed, in infant baptism, Luther suggests:

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[211] Ibid., 684.
[212] Ibid., 689.
[213] Ibid., 686.
[214] Ibid., 688.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid., 689.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.

> the child is not baptized on the ground of the faith of others, but in the midst of the believing Church, which brings it to Baptism with hope and prayer that God will bless it, initiate it, and sanctify it in the simple faith of His Word.[219]

The relationship between baptism and the Word of God was believed by Luther both to bestow faith and to require faith for fruitful use.[220] Similarly, the Reformation Church of England maintains that baptism is to "be regarded as the means of grace whereby God begins to beget or quicken faith."[221]

The importance of the relationship between the corporate nature of the church and faith is explicated in the notion of the "One baptism." Whilst Calvin had identified the activity of each of the Trinity in baptism, believing that "the *cause* is in the Father," the Son is "the *matter*" of "cleansing and regeneration," and "the *effect* is in the Spirit,"[222] he also contended that they could not be divided into three separate processes. Instead it was "one Baptism by the One Lord, the One Spirit, and the One God and Father of all."[223] Nevertheless, Calvin not only affirms that baptism is firmly grounded in Jesus' own baptism in the Jordan, which heralded the beginning of his mission as the Suffering Servant, but he also believes that in baptism an individual shares in the obedience of Christ, is sanctified by and thereafter lives in union with him.[224] It follows that "each individual Christian's Baptism is merely the sharing of one common Baptism, which the whole Church shares in common with Christ," through which the individual "is made one body and soul in union with Christ."[225] It is at this point that the Commission is keen to highlight the connection between Calvin's theology regarding the oneness of baptism and the idea of incorporation and adoption into the one body:

> We all have the same Baptism whereby we are ingrafted into the common Body of Christ; yet His Baptism is conferred on every individual that they may surely acknowledge that they are partakers in the adoption, and therefore members of the Church (*Comm. on Exod*. xii. 11).[226]

Nevertheless, whilst individuals are baptised into a common baptism, through which they become members of the body that is the Church, the report emphasises that Calvin made a

[219] Ibid., 669.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid., 702.
[222] Ibid., 683.
[223] Ibid., 682.
[224] Ibid., 679.
[225] Ibid., 680.
[226] Ibid.

distinction regarding "degrees of adoption."[227] The Reformation Church of England affirmed that

> just as circumcision was a mark to distinguish between members of Covenant people and Gentiles, so Baptism is the mark to distinguish members of Christ's holy Church and non-Christians (*Hom.* XXI).[228]

Calvin, in contrast, maintained that although baptism is rightly seen as one of the "signs and seals of the Covenant" and "badges of the Church," if the baptized do not receive and use their baptism in "faith and repentance" then "unbelief draws a distinction between themselves and the faithful."[229] Thus, not only can a distinction be made between those who are in the Church and those who are in the world, but the Commission suggest that within the body of Christ, those who reject the grace offered in the Gospel mark themselves as different. Whilst God remains faithful to God's own covenant promises, the Commission recognise that those who remain in their state of unbelief after death "will be cut off in the judgement."[230] This theme is developed by the Commission in their consideration of Calvin's *Commentary to the Romans* and particularly his discussion of "a threefold form of grafting and a twofold form of cutting off." Amongst the "grafted in" are the children of believers, those who perceive the Gospel but in whom it fails to take root, and the elect; which the Anglican Church, under the influence of Bucer, believed to be the same as those incorporated in baptism.[231] Cutting off occurs when those baptised as infants "refuse the promise given to their fathers," or "do not receive it through unthankfulness," or when "the seed of the Gospel withers, and is corrupted" in those who "conceive the seed of the Gospel."[232] Thus, Calvin can say that

> the whole Church is baptized in Christ, because He identified Himself with it, taking it up into the Covenant with Him, and consecrating it in Himself, that all within the Church might be members of His Body, or branches of the True Vine. Those who do not abide in Him are cut off and cast out.[233]

From this, it is clear that for Calvin, baptism requires a response. Whilst affirming that baptism is the "sacrament of initiation into the sphere of common life in the Body of Christ," the report emphasises that the Gospel is only "effectively presented" within that sphere. This idea is shared with the Anglican Church. Anglicans, the Commission suggest, believe that insertion into the Church is synonymous with regeneration, for it is "the sphere

[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid., 698.
[229] Ibid., 680.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid., 700.
[232] Ibid., 680.
[233] Ibid.

of new life in the Church, where His promises of forgiveness and adoption may be actualized."[234]Nevertheless, the report stresses that for Calvin, even within that place, "men may harden their hearts in unbelief and reject the grace of God in Baptism."[235] Therefore, "the act of God in Baptism is to be accompanied or followed by a corresponding act of man attesting his faith."[236] Moreover, whilst not explicitly making reference to Luther's concept of the priesthood of all believers, the Commission does affirm that, for Calvin, the baptized, marked, nourished and growing in faith, have a responsibility to respond with "thankfulness and witness" in particular, "growth in obedience and service to God (*Serm. on 2 Tim.* ii. 19)."[237]

From this overview of the beginnings of Reformed theology, some obvious and subtle differences and developments begin to emerge. Whilst challenging the medieval notion that the Church was the sole dispenser of the sacraments, through which grace was effected *ex opera operato*, and that it was consequently the exclusive sphere of salvation, the Reformers did maintain that baptism was incorporation and admission into the compass of God's forgiving and saving activity. To be baptised into the Church was to be adopted by God and become a member of Christ's body. Infant baptism was justified on the grounds of Christ's command and the covenantal promise. Thus, with the Word, preached and proclaimed, at the centre of the people of God, the sacrament of baptism was to be used to nourish faith and the union of the baptized with Christ and one another, in the commonality of the one baptism. Whilst God's activity and movement towards humanity was always primary, it is clear that the Reformer's expected baptism to require a response of faith, and failure to affirm belief would result, ultimately, in detachment from God who was present in the Church.

Exploring the verbatim minutes of 1957, it would seem that the report appeared to pass with little comment and controversy, demonstrated in Professor Pitt-Watson's words:

> I am equally proud today to think that this Church of our fathers is producing theologians of the stamp of Professor Torrance. I think we should take note of their labours, and at least if we are not going to discuss the report, render to them an indication of our gratitude and of our pride.[238]

[234] Ibid., 699.
[235] Ibid., 680.
[236] Ibid., 683.
[237] Ibid., 681.
[238] Verbatim Minutes of the General Assembly, 1957, 1061.

The Convener himself had stated that "it is not, I think, a controversial report, except, perhaps, the section that deals with the teaching of the mediaeval Church and the Roman Church."[239] The Commission had highlighted the Roman Church's focus on the outward and practical administration of baptism and had sought to show that this was to the detriment of the significance of baptism. This had led to an exploration of the Reformation and an emphasis upon the centrality of Christ. Indeed, the Convenor had stated that "the great debt we owe to the Reformation, and especially to Calvin, was the recovery of the evangelical doctrine of personal union and communion with Christ."[240] Given the previous reports this was not surprising, and yet the discussion of Calvin and the covenant leads to some idiosyncratic conclusions. Here Torrance's influence is very apparent: the report states that the doctrine of union with Christ is a central conception in Calvin's theology of baptism and is used by Calvin to emphasise personal union with Christ. As the report progresses, this leads to a discussion of infant and adult baptism. However, rather than focussing explicitly on a justification of infant baptism that was reliant on covenant theology alone, the report appears to pull together two ideas, relating baptism both to covenant and, probably reflecting Torrance's influence, to incarnation, which resulted in a confused and confusing account. Whilst stressing that faith is a prerequisite for adult baptism, the Commission maintains that in the case of infants passivity is acceptable, because God's promise precedes all faith. Yet, it concludes that for Calvin, in the long term, baptism does require a response. This is a valid position, but the introduction of the incarnation and Christ's sanctification of all people into this discussion confuses the argument and weakens the case for infant baptism by drawing on a model that appears to reduce the place of faith. Torrance suggested:

> If we have problems today in understanding how baptism can be applied equally to infants and adults, I submit it is because we have failed to give the obedience of Jesus Christ its full place in the centre of our salvation.[241]

Torrance's belief in the centrality of Christ and the importance of his whole life in soteriology, leads him to conclude that baptism begins and ends with Christ because he is the mediator. This is clear when he says:

> Calvin does not think of it in two dimensions, of the action of God on the one hand and our obedience on the other. He does think of those two, but he also thinks, and primarily thinks of a middle point, of the mediator, Jesus Christ, who is not only the act of God, but who gathers us up and bring us into obedience to God, and by his own obedience lightens the true way of obedience to God, and therefore whenever we think of the act of God and the act of man, we have to concentrate

[239] Ibid., 1047.
[240] Ibid., 1060.
[241] Ibid., 1059.

> upon the mediator, and there and there only that we understand the meaning of the sacrament of baptism.[242]

He proceeds to suggest:

> Baptism is the sacrament primarily of the obedience of Jesus Christ, and it is the sacrament which promises that although we are unable to give to God an adequate account of ourselves, Jesus Christ give us an account in our place, and the sacrament of baptism is a sacrament of his obedience primarily, and secondly it is the sacrament which is the badge by which we show that we are members of Christ, children of the Heavenly Father, through the mediation of Christ, and by which we show that we follow Him and are obedient to Him.[243]

Thus, whilst perhaps uncontroversial in the proceedings of the Commission as they worked on the 1957 Interim Report, the theme of union with Christ introduced in this report was to lead to much discussion and disagreement both within the General Assembly and the wider church.

The 1958 Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism

The themes of election and covenant, the relationship between salvation and the doctrine of Christ and the nature of the Church, visible and invisible, are prominent in the 1958 report. The Commission had initially intended that this report would offer an overview of the historical developments in baptismal theology from the Reformation until the present day. In the event, it explored the period between 1549 and 1843 under five main headings: (1) Baptism in the pre-Reformation Church, (2) Baptism at the Reformation, (3) the older Scottish tradition, 1581-1647, (4) the Westminster Tradition, 1647-1690 and (5) the Presbyterian Tradition, 1690-1843. At the end of the report an epilogue is offered, which suggests that

> the main difficulties in our understanding of Baptism have their roots beyond Baptism itself, regarded as a sacramental sign and seal. This means that the doctrine of Baptism cannot be divorced from the doctrine of Christ and His saving work, nor from the doctrine of the Church. This means in turn that any positive attempt to build up the doctrine of Baptism afresh for the Church today must rest upon the solid foundation of a Biblical understanding of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.[244]

Three main areas of tension are outlined, which the Commission believe will offer questions for future discussion and study, "to which firm and clear answers must be given"

[242] Ibid., 1058.
[243] Ibid., 1059.
[244] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1958, 743.

if "a Biblical and Reformed doctrine of Baptism" is to be built up again.[245] These are (1) the contradiction between federal theology and the Gospel of grace, (2) the divorce of the atonement from the incarnation, and (3) the separation of the Church visible from the Church invisible.[246] Given that each tension is so closely entwined with the other, rather than exploring each of these in turn, this section will examine the periods outlined by the Commission, highlighting the three tensions, and calling attention to the historical developments that led to the variations, in order to discern the impact these had on baptismal ecclesiology from the time of the Reformation to the Disruption. In doing so, it will also consider the extent to which these three tensions arose from the history of the doctrine of Baptism in Scotland, and the extent to which these concerns shaped the Commission's reading of that history.

Reformation

The first tension suggested by the report is the contradiction between federal theology and the gospel of grace. This tension began to emerge in Scotland in the sixteenth century and was firmly established in the teaching of the Covenanters, before being challenged by some within the Presbyterian tradition. At the heart of this tension is the question of covenant. It is evident that both pre- and post- Reformation theologians, with their emphasis upon scripture and the continuity between Old and New Testaments, maintained the importance of the covenant community. Within Scotland, the Commission notes, this emphasis is apparent in Hamilton's Catechism (1552), which makes reference to the covenant between God and man. Of more long-lasting significance was the fact that John Knox, also upheld the covenant of grace, for which he is singled out by the Commission as the "master spirit and master mind" of the Scottish Reformation.[247] A focus on the covenant of grace is, the Commission observes, common to all the seminal documents of the Scottish Reformation, including the *Scots Confession*, the *Book of Common Order* and the *Book of Discipline.* Thus, it suggests, the *Scots Confession* acknowledged that "a divine ordinance or covenant of grace is the grand theme of all history and all theology" and that "upon that ordinance of grace the order of creation and of redemption depends."[248]

In the Scottish Reformation, as elsewhere, only two sacraments were recognised: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism was considered to be the "the sign and seal of our 'first

[245] Ibid., 745.
[246] Ibid., 744.
[247] Ibid., 693.
[248] Ibid., 694.

entrance' into the household of faith, the family of the heavenly Father, and so the inheritance of His children within the Covenant of grace."[249]As a sacrament of God's Fatherly love, the Scottish Reformers believed that baptism was the "sacrament of the New Covenant that corresponds to circumcision as the sacrament of the Old Covenant ([Knox] *Works*, VI., p.96; IV., p.197)."[250] Therefore, Baptism was believed to initiate the baptizand "into this Covenant which God maintains in utter faithfulness, so that as He has given us the sign of His children, He continues to 'acknowledge us as of His heavenly household'" ([Knox] *Works*, IV., p.123).[251] Consequently, the baptism of infants was considered by the Reformers to be "essentially relevant,"[252] and they believed that it was "right and natural that the children of those already members of Christ and of the New Covenant should also be baptized and given the sign of God's children."[253] Whilst the faith and knowledge of those who were presenting a child for baptism was examined,[254] and the pledge to nourish the life of the child within the Church was emphasised,[255] the Scottish Reformers believed that there was only one covenant. Through the Gospel of grace, the promises of God were assured, regeneration through Christ's righteousness was possible, and all could belong to the Covenant either through their own faith or by being born into a family of those who were already members of the Church.

This theology reflected the affirmation of the close relationship between the incarnation and the atonement, which in the Commission's view had led the Reformers to view the sacraments as "signs and seals of *our union with Christ."*[256] Knox also believed that Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection had effected a union with humankind, which "through sacramental participation" in baptism was made "visible and manifest," establishing a "visible difference between Christ's people and those who are not in covenant with Him ([Knox] *Works,* VI, p.494)."[257] Baptism was deemed by the Commission to be "related directly to the person and work of the Son," and as "sign and seal" of the engrafting of the baptised into him.[258] In and through this engrafting, the baptised were enabled to become partakers in the work of Christ, who:

> incorporated Himself into our humanity, suffered the Father's judgement as in our person … rose again from the dead in our humanity and ascended to open up the

[249] Ibid., 695.
[250] Ibid., 696.
[251] Ibid., 697.
[252] Ibid., 696.
[253] Ibid., 697.
[254] Ibid., 701.
[255] Ibid., 697.
[256] Ibid., 694.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid., 697.

> heavens unto us and to make an entrance for us so that we may boldly appear before the Father's throne of mercy ([Knox] *Works,* VI, p.321).[259]

Therefore, through this ingrafting, the baptised elect were assured of the promises of God, the forgiveness of sins, and were able to share in the benefits of Christ; having been translated out of their "natural state" into an inheritance of "newness of life" they were "clothed with Christ and endowed with His righteousness."[260] In the Commission's view (although not in the view of most modern historians of the period), during the period of the Scottish Reformation a clear theological link was made between the incarnation and atonement, and baptism came to be seen as the sign and seal of the union with Christ which had been brought about through his life and work.

Indeed, the Commission observed that union and unity are also prominent themes in the theology of the Scots Reformers, and highlighted the Reformers' understanding of the sacraments as "a bond and sign of the *unity of the Church.*"[261] Whilst a distinction was made between those who were baptised and those who were not; within the Church itself, the emphasis upon the "One baptism" mitigated against a separation of the Church visible from the Church invisible. Instead, Knox, who, in the Commission's reading, had a "horror of division and disunity in the Church,"[262] suggested that

> By one Baptism, we are all made clean and purified, and by it we are ingrafted into Christ, and made the people of God, purified from our sins and altogether buried with Christ. There is amongst us all but one power or strength of Baptism; and in One Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are we baptized ([Knox] *Works,* III, p.522).[263]

Therefore, the unity brought about by the one baptism reinforced the bond between all the baptised who were understood to be the people of God united in one faith, one name, and one body. Thus, baptism defined their ecclesiology.

Older Scottish Tradition

Within the older Scottish tradition (1581-1647), in contrast, the Commission suggested that certain theological emphases began to emerge which they believed to have contributed to what they saw as later distortions of the Doctrine of Baptism.[264] Whilst preachers like John

[259] Ibid., 698.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid., 694.
[262] Ibid., 695.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid., 701.

Craig, John Davidson, and Robert Bruce appeared to maintain the theology of the one covenant of grace, the theology of Robert Rollock, minister and first Principal of Edinburgh University, witnessed to the emergence of federal theology, which the Commission's report saw as deeply problematic. That is, whereas for Calvin and many of the Reformers the "substance of both the Old and New Testaments was the same, Jesus Christ and the Gospel of grace and redemption," for Rollock, the Commission argued, "there are two covenants, one of works and one of grace."[265] The former is based upon "nature, and the law of God which was originally graven in man's heart," whilst the latter is "founded in Christ crucified or in the Blood of the Mediator, which satisfies the justice of God on account of the breach of the covenant of works."[266] For Rollock, those with faith were at one and the same time "under the covenant of grace for their justification and redemption," and "still under the covenant of works in so far as their nature is still unregenerate."[267] The covenant of works was meant to push the baptised "forward in all faith and godliness, by revealing to them not only the holiness and majesty of God but their own corrupt nature."[268] In doing so, faith appears to have become a condition of salvation, and good works the means whereby the baptised "labour for that sanctification and regeneration" in order to "bring forth the fruits of the Spirit."[269] The Commission saw this development as leading the Church of Scotland away from a proper focus on the one covenant of grace.

The Commission viewed this development as stemming, in part, from the relational separation of the incarnation from the atonement. The report highlights several key thinkers during this period who held diverging opinions from the federalists. In the theology of John Craig, the relationship between the incarnation and atonement is affirmed so that "union with Christ and faith are correlative," resulting in a "two-fold union:"[270]

> The primary union is that which Christ has made with us when He became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, but through the operation of the Spirit all who have faith in Christ are made flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone … it is only through this union, through our ingrafting into Christ by faith, that we come to share in all Christ's benefits.[271]

Therefore, whilst faith is important in Craig's thinking, union with Christ is not divorced from his life and death, with the result that the benefits can be received, rather than worked

[265] Ibid., 706.
[266] Ibid., 706-707.
[267] Ibid., 707.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid., 702.
[271] Ibid.

for. The covenant of grace is therefore paramount within this model, as is the "conception of the church as the Communion of those who are united to Christ and united mutually to one another in Christ."[272] The report emphasises Craig's belief that Christ died for all people, and concludes that his understanding of election was "more bound up with adoption into Christ than with an eternal decree of predestination," with the result that the union with Christ, the head of the Church, "exists only within the communion of the redeemed."[273] In continuity with this thinking, the Commission highlighted the work of Robert Bruce, whose main emphasis also was union with Christ. Bruce believed that Christ's reconciling activity was three-fold; this resulted in a refusal to "divorce the atoning work on the Cross from the atoning work in Christ's birth and incarnate life."[274] Consequently, in Bruce's thinking, it is the "whole Christ" into whom the baptised are ingrafted; for the baptised, "extends and seals … a justification, sanctification, and regeneration" that is not in themselves "but in *Christ.*"[275] The Commission included and favoured these views as they reinforced union with Christ and the vicarious nature of his life.

In the theology of John Davidson, theological subtleties began to emerge. Whilst Davidson placed emphasis upon the "person and work of Christ," and believed that "our salvation is wholly in Christ, and not in our own person," he also made "a clear distinction between justification and sanctification."[276] The report suggested that this was because, when the concept of union with Christ became weakened, "justification needs to be supplemented by a life of good works before we can be saved."[277] Nevertheless, although his thought shows hints of federal theology, it is evident that Davidson upheld a belief in union with Christ, and that he saw baptism as "an entrance into Christ and His Kirk," thus relating it directly to "Christ Himself as well as to the Visible Church or the covenant community."[278] In his preaching, thought the Commission, the bond between the Church visible and Church invisible appears to have been intact.

In many respects it would appear that a baptismal theology that holds together the incarnation and atonement in union with Christ, will also seek to maintain the unity of the One Church. This is evident in the theology of Craig, who the Commission suggests made

[272] Ibid., 701.
[273] Ibid., 702.
[274] Ibid., 704.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid., 703.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid.

"no divorce … between baptismal reception in the Church and into the Kingdom of Heaven."[279] Here, there is no suggestion of a distinction between the elect and the group of all the baptised; instead within the theology of the covenant of grace, all the baptised are included in the Kingdom. Similarly, Bruce upheld the view that the baptised experienced not only union with Christ but also conjunction with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.[280] This resulted in a spiritual bond between the baptised, which meant that

> The same Holy Spirit who is in Him is in every one of us in some measure, and because one Spirit is in Him and in us, therefore we are all reckoned to be one Body and to be members of one spiritual and mystical Body.[281]

For Bruce, the Church had a physical, visible presence, but was also an invisible bond, which held the faithful together within the one body that is the Church. In the theology of Robert Boyd of Trochrig, Principal and Professor of Divinity at Glasgow in the early seventeenth century, the Commission observe the Oneness of Baptism uniting both the living and dead (as demonstrated in the Communion of Saints) was emphasised. Having been baptized into the same death, the baptised must be taught to "foster and maintain unity and concord among themselves," for it is by "the same Baptism that all the faithful are consecrated and dedicated to the worship and obedience of the Triune God, and are pledged to Jesus Christ whose insignia they all bear equally."[282] Likewise, the report suggests that for Boyd, through the one Spirit, all are planted together in Christ, and become one body,[283] leading him to ask, "if the faithful are divided among themselves, what else is it but to divide Christ?"[284] Hence, the importance of the unity of the Body, and the equality of the members therein, lessen any distinctions between the visible and invisible Church. Towards the middle of the seventeenth century, John Forbes, Professor of Divinity in Aberdeen, "followed Calvin in holding very strongly to the Biblical conceptions of covenant and election."[285] Thus, whilst the report suggests that Forbes did not adopt federal theology, he did maintain that "God's predestination and God's covenant are not opposed to each other."[286] Instead, following the model of a "three-fold sanctification," Forbes insisted that alongside federal holiness and baptismal holiness, there is a spiritual holiness, which "is the sanctification of spiritual and invisible regeneration."[287] Only the latter can save: this is "the holiness of those who prove to be of

[279] Ibid., 702.
[280] Ibid., 706.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid., 709.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid., 712.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.

the elect,"[288] remaining faithful to the end. Here an ecclesiological distinction is made between the elect, who are the invisible Church, and the baptised, initiated into the covenant of grace in the visible Church, which was only to widen as the years progressed.

Westminster Tradition

The report categorises the theology of the period just after the drawing up of the Westminster Confession (1646) as the "Westminster tradition" (1647-1690). In this period, the Commission argues, federal theology, together with a close alignment between Calvinism and the new Aristotelianism, ran alongside that older Scottish tradition "deriving from *The Scots Confession,* and nourished continuously by the pre-Westminster Catechisms."[289] Whilst federal theology had not been "officially adopted" by the Church of Scotland, the Westminster Standards, accepted as the Church of Scotland's chief doctrinal norms, were explicit regarding the nature of the two covenants. Thus, in relation to the covenant and Church, the Westminster Standards affirm:

> There are held to be *two covenants:* the covenant of works … called by the *Larger Catechism* a covenant of life … and the covenant of grace … The covenant of works was made under the condition of personal obedience to God's law, and had no Mediator. The covenant of grace expresses God's voluntary condescension to man, and was made with Christ as the second Adam, and with all the elect in Him as His seed, who are required to believe in Him that they may be justified and saved. Christ is the Mediator of this covenant of grace made in His death. It is a testament as well as a covenant. In Christ the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, is bequeathed to the elect and faithful. There are not two covenants of grace, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament, but one covenant with different dispensations, Christ being the substance of the covenant promised under the old dispensation and fulfilled under the new dispensation.[290]

It is the covenant of grace that holds the promise of salvation through Christ's death. With relation to baptism, the Westminster Standards maintain that

> Baptism is the sacrament of our entrance into that inheritance or Kingdom, or of our reception into the household of faith where we are regarded by God not as we are in ourselves but as we are in Christ our surety, who ever intercedes for us.[291]

Here the covenant of works seems superfluous, given the emphasis upon grace and Christ's mediation, as well as the support for infant baptism. As a "sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace," the report highlights that baptism is "an act of sanctification," both

[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid., 714.
[290] Ibid., 715.
[291] Ibid., 720.

for those born within the covenantal family, and those who are welcomed into it, "through faith or by adoption."[292] Further, baptism is

> [a] sacrament of all the benefits that come from union with Christ, of all the blessings of the covenant, and of our inheritance in Christ's Kingdom, reaching out into the life of the resurrection.[293]

However, according to the Commission, the emphasis placed upon Christ's death by federal theology caused the theology of the post-Westminster period to neglect the relationship between the incarnation and atonement, so that union with Christ no longer meant unity with all the baptized. Rather, ecclesiologically, whilst the Westminster Standards uphold the view that "Baptism is to be administered and given only within the Household of Faith for it belongs to the Church,"[294] the Catechism suggests that baptism, as a holy ordinance, should be understood to "signify, seal, and convey *Christ Himself* ... as well as His benefits," but "only to those within the covenant of grace," and it is only effectual for "those who are the elect within it."[295] This is because of the explicit separation found within the Westminster Confession, between the visible and invisible Church:

> The sacraments, as seals of this covenant of grace, are given to the catholic Church. As invisible this Church consists of the whole number of the elect gathered into one, under Christ the Head, and is "the Spouse, the Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." As visible, it consists of "all those throughout the world who profess the true religion together with their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." ([*West*]*Conf.*, XXV., 1-3).[296]

Not only is a distinction made here between the invisible elect, and the visible, physical Church, but a difference is also highlighted between the Body of Christ and the Kingdom of God. These themes of covenant and election and their relation to ecclesiology continued to evolve during the post-Westminster period, as is most evident in the theology of the Covenanters, at a time when "federal theology came to occupy a dominant position in the Kirk."[297]

With an emphasis upon spiritual experience and personal covenanting, the report suggests that the theology of the Covenanting period proposed a close relationship between the

[292] Ibid., 718.
[293] Ibid., 719.
[294] Ibid., 721.
[295] Ibid., 716.
[296] Ibid., 715.
[297] Ibid., 725.

covenant of Christ and the religio-political covenants of 1638 and 1643,[298] but also witnessed the further division of Rollock's two covenants into three by a further division of the covenant of grace "into the absolute covenant of redemption and a conditional covenant of grace," set alongside the covenant of works.[299] The Commission explain that in this view:

> The covenant of redemption was eternal, resting upon the eternal decrees and counsels of the Trinity, and involving a contract between the Father and Son for the salvation of the elect, in which the Son undertook to become the incarnate Mediator who would fulfil the covenant from the side of God and from the side of man. There was also a subordinate covenant of grace or reconciliation in which Christ bestows redemption, or "the law-rights" to eternal life, as a testamentary inheritance to men who fulfil the condition of faith.[300]

Thus, moving away from the theology of the Scots Reformers, who had maintained that there was only one covenant, the report highlights that for the Covenanters, it would appear that there are two covenants: one that affirms the work of Christ for the elect, and another that fulfils that work upon a confession of faith. As the Commission points out, this complicated the theology of baptism, for it is unclear of which covenant baptism is an initiatory sign and seal.[301] Moreover, this theology raises the problem of election in the context of a gospel of grace, and also the issue of an electing grace that is dependent upon a declaration of faith.[302] Having considered the theology of men like Samuel Rutherford, William Guthrie and James Durham, the Commission suggested that if baptism was to be retained in Covenantal theology, it "could only be relegated to an insignificant place as a legalistic rite, initiating us into our obligations to obey the commands of Christ, mediated through the institutional Church."[303] In this view, they thought there had been a "radical abandoning of the Biblical conception of the covenant for another conceived in terms of legal and commercial contract drawn upon between men."[304] As a result, the report maintained the emphasis upon

> soul-examination, and verbal restipulation, or personal covenanting [had] tended toward the depreciation of Baptism both by the multitudes who were taught too often to regard it as only the seal of federal holiness, and by the godly who subordinated it to personal and private covenants of the soul.

The Reformed notion of the covenant of grace had been subordinated to a man-made contract with God, with an emphasis upon personal commitment or covenanting. The

[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid., 725-726.
[303] Ibid., 727.
[304] Ibid., 726.

relationship between the incarnation and atonement had been damaged by the emphasis on federal theology and election, which assumed that the "Incarnate Son was not the head of all men, but only of the elect." In consequence, "the essential unity between redemption and creation … [had been] severely damaged."[305] Theologians such as John Brown could see no other doctrine than that of "limited atonement for the elect only." For the Commission, this meant that "the essential relation between the incarnation and the atonement … [had been] allowed to drop out of sight,"[306] and that "union with Christ was now generally conceived of simply in forensic and legal terms."[307] Baptism had lost its evangelical character.

From an ecclesiological perspective, the report notes that, according to Guthrie, it was no longer considered enough

> for a man's safety and relief that he is in covenant with God as a born member of the visible Church, by virtue of the parents' subjection to God's ordinance: neither will it suffice that the person had the initiating seal of Baptism added, and that he then virtually engaged to seek salvation by Christ's blood, as all infants do: neither doth it suffice that men are come of believing parents; their faith will not instate their children into a right to the spiritual blessings of the covenant: neither will it suffice that parents did in some respect engage for their children, and give them to God; all these things do not avail … unless a man, in his own person, put forth faith in Christ Jesus, and with his own heart be pleased and acquiesce in that device of saving sinners, he cannot be saved.[308]

As a result of the division of the covenants and the emphasis placed upon an individual's faith and "closing with Christ," a clear, "sharp distinction" was now "being made, between the visible and invisible Church."[309] The Commission believed that in spite of what they recognised to be "the good intentions of the popular preachers," there had been a departure from what they understood to be the "Reformed conception of the Church" and a movement towards "the conception of 'the gathered Church'."[310] Furthermore, noting the political nature of the Covenanters, the Commission believed that when the contract between God and humankind was understood as analogous to contracts between people, "the evangelical and political interests were too often combined and confounded." The consequence, they suggested, was the belief that "to be sealed with the covenant in Baptism often meant little more than to become a member of the national Church."[311]

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[305] Ibid.
[306] Ibid., 728.
[307] Ibid., 726.
[308] Ibid., 724.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Ibid., 725.
[311] Ibid.

Whilst the Commission acknowledged that federal theology continued to have a place in the Church after 1690, they also observed "distinct tendencies to modify the extremes of the post-Westminster period."[312] During this time, they suggest,

> the religio-political covenants were allowed to fall entirely into the background, so that undivided attention was concentrated upon the covenant of grace, and upon the Church as the Body of Christ, without being confounded with nationalistic movements.[313]

The result of this, in the post-revolution Church, was an emphasis upon God's Fatherly love in baptism, which, according to John Warden, had been instituted to "represent, set forth, and keep up the remembrance of the infinite grace and love of God in Christ to lost sinners."[314] Warden emphasised the importance of baptism as a sacrament of ingrafting, whereby infants and adults alike, tinged with original sin, could be "cleansed and sealed unto regeneration … redeemed and liberated by the Blood of Christ … and savingly and actually brought into the Covenant."[315] Here, the Commission was keen to highlight that in contrast to the earlier stress on federal holiness, grace was, once again, prominent.[316] Likewise, in the theology of Thomas Boston, "the covenant and the Church cannot be separated because the covenant is fulfilled in Christ."[317] As such, the Body of Christ, the Church, is considered to be inseparable from Christ. However, whilst Boston departed from the idea of federal holiness, he did maintain that "Baptism is only rightly administered to children whose immediate parents are faithful members of Christ, of His Body."[318] Although Boston suggested that "children of those who are openly wicked cannot be baptized," he also affirmed that "we must take people on profession of their faith, 'without a scrupulous inquiry of their state before God'."[319] Here, there appears to be an ambivalence regarding the purpose and place of faith. On the one hand, faith seems to be important for recognising those who belong to the covenant and allowing subsequent initiation into it. On the other hand, whilst character and behaviour are important, an assertion of faith appears to be enough, without examination or assessment. Thus, Boston can affirm that "the visible Body of Christ is made up of saints by profession, not openly contradicted by their habitual practice (*The Unity of the Body of Christ and the Duties of*

[312] Ibid., 729.
[313] Ibid., 728.
[314] Ibid., 729.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid.
[317] Ibid., 735.
[318] Ibid., 736.
[319] Ibid.

its Members to one another, *Works*, III., p.620)."[320] In many respects, this is a move away from the legalism of federal theology and its stress upon faith and the covenant works, a move which was epitomised in the theology of John Welsh, who believed that "'it is not the measure of faith that saves' but the strength of Christ's hold upon us."[321] In this reading of salvation, it is the faithfulness of Christ that is paramount, and it is the covenant of grace, through baptism, which reveals it.

The Commission observed, however, that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in the teaching of the Secession, the importance and function of faith differed, with "an increasing stress upon the intellectual content and act of faith," which ran alongside an "increasing emphasis upon experiential faith, upon the persuasions of the heart, and upon justifying faith as full of inwrought grace."[322] This leads the Commission to observe that "under the federal theology the whole conception of *covenant* changed into a *contract* with its mutual stipulations voluntary undertaken as between equal partners."[323] As a result, there was "an inevitable stress upon man's necessary fulfilment of stipulated conditions before he could have even an interest in Christ."[324] In the Commission's view, this legalism and moralism

> obscured the essential nature of the Gospel of grace as the unconditional offer of salvation to all men as guilty sinners for whom Christ died, and therefore obscured the essential nature of Baptism as an evangelical ordinance sealing the gracious promise of Christ.[325]

This continuing legalism had repercussions for the growing disparity between the theology related to Union with Christ and the incarnation and atonement.

Moreover, whilst many of those within the Presbyterian tradition (including Thomas Boston and John Welsh) upheld that baptism was a sacrament of union with Christ, and made reference to the Incarnation, there was an increasing sense of ambiguity regarding what this actually meant. The report argues that the Scots Reformers had maintained the principle that "Election cannot be separated from the Incarnation of the Son in time, nor from the historical Church which has union with Him."[326] However, during this time, they suggest that as a consequence of the "growth of the federal theology and a scholastic

[320] Ibid.
[321] Ibid., 737.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Ibid., 744.
[324] Ibid.
[325] Ibid.
[326] Ibid., 732.

predestinarianism," erroneous tendencies emerged within the Scottish tradition.[327] One of these errors had been the tendency to regard "predestination as an eternal decree that took place apart from Christ and the Incarnation,"[328] which resulted in a cementing of the federal emphasis upon two covenants, suggest a limited atonement, and separate justification from sanctification. According to the Commission, one of the outcomes of this "dominance of the federal conception of the plan of salvation with its emphasis upon forensic transaction," was to depreciate "the whole conception of union with Christ, while at the same time exalting the Church as a legal and ecclesiastical institution" to the extent that "the sacraments tended to become attached to it rather than to the Person of Christ."[329]

Naturally, this had consequences for the Church's self-understanding, with a growing split between the theology of the visible and invisible Church. The Scots Reformers had upheld the view that the invisible Church was "not to be separated from the visible Church in history, for although the invisible Church is not co-terminous with the visible Church, they overlap."[330] Indeed, John Knox had affirmed

> Because the visible Church is the object of faith, we must say that it is the visible Church which is invisibly hidden with Christ in God. Thus there is only one Church which is both visible and invisible, although the invisible aspect reaches out far beyond the visible and the visible includes much that is only transient and does not ultimately belong to the invisible.[331]

Therefore, whilst not denying the visible and invisible nature of the Church, the Commission believes that the Reformers asserted that there is only one Church, one body, of which Christ is the Head. Election was thought possible "only in and through Christ and operates in time through union with Christ … and is identified with God's Love and Word."[332] In contrast, in the theology of Samuel Rutherford and the post-Westminster divines, there was a sense in which "the invisible Church of the elect only was wholly hidden, but the visible Church was made as wide as possible to include all hearers of the Word and was virtually identified with the national society."[333] Consequently, baptism had become "attached directly to the institutional Church and not to Christ."[334] In an attempt to resolve this situation, the report suggests a distinction began to be made between the visible Kingdom of God, otherwise known as the external covenant. However, this led to

[327] Ibid., 732-733.
[328] Ibid., 733.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid., 732.
[331] Ibid.
[332] Ibid.
[333] Ibid., 734.
[334] Ibid.

pressure from the State and the requirement that the visible and invisible Church be held together. The division grew wider with the emergence of the doctrine of *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, which taught "the separation of a spiritual Church of the elect from the visible Church."[335] Within this understanding, "Baptism was regarded as the seal of the visible Church," whilst the "Lord's Supper was regarded as the seal of the invisible Church;" the former thus became associated with "external profession," whilst the latter became the "sacrament of internal experience."[336]

The report suggests that these developments "came into sharp conflict in the fierce quarrel between the Protesters and Resolutioners" in which the distinction "between the invisible Church and visible Church … began to break up, and to disrupt the one Church."[337] According to the Commission, the outcome was a failure to see "that in a very real sense the visible Church is the Body of Christ." It believed that it was this lack of insight which led to the Secession of 1733.[338] The fundamental difficulty in this analysis was "to hold together Baptism as initiation into the visible Church and Baptism as ingrafting into the Body of Christ."[339] The former had led to the Church's being "identified with the general society professing to be Christian," with the result that "Baptism then was simply the sign of membership in the social and moral order of the Christian nation."[340] The latter, on the other hand, had led to a "growing insistence that the Church must be identified only with real believers, with those whose lives showed signs of being regenerate."[341]

In the 1958 report it is apparent that the main thrust of the Commission's argument is to criticise federal theology, which, in the eyes of the Commission, is responsible for the divorce of the incarnation from the atonement and the subsequent separation of the invisible church from the visible. From the outset of the report, the Commission's stance is clear: the doctrine of baptism cannot be separated from the doctrine of Christ and his saving work. Thus, the vicarious nature of Jesus is paramount and the Commission go to great lengths as they explore the various historical periods to choose theologians, including Knox, Craig and Bruce, who support the notion that baptism is about the baptized union with Christ. Within Torrance's opening address to the General Assembly he makes the

[335] Ibid.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Ibid.
[339] Ibid.
[340] Ibid.
[341] Ibid.

Commission's position very clear, stating that from the older Scottish tradition down to 1647, "there are three points … I should like to stress."[342] These are:

> First, the fact that baptism is directly related to Jesus Christ. It is the doctrine of union with Christ that is of outstanding importance in all this teaching up to 1647 … The second thing … is that throughout this period the basic pattern of baptism is undoubtedly that of the baptism of infants … The third thing I should like to emphasise is the really amazing relationship of the sacrament to the Gospel.[343]

Torrance proceeds to suggest that "if the Church had kept throughout its history to what is laid down in the Westminster Directory," then they "would not be faced with the problems that they are faced with today … the misunderstanding which is so rife in the Church in regard to Baptism."[344] In Torrance's view, problems emerged as a consequence of federalism, which "corrupted the doctrine of baptism,"[345] by splitting the covenant of grace into three separate covenants:

> When the Covenant is divided up like that into three Covenants immediately you have to ask of which Covenant is baptism the seal, and immediately you see we are faced with a very desperate problem, and baptism came to be the seal only of the third covenant which was called the external covenant, that is baptism became the seal only of admission into the constitutional Church, the visible Church, the external ministry, the external covenant. When that happened baptism became divorced from immediate relation to Jesus Christ, and that is our problem.[346]

Therefore, the split of the covenant into three resulted in subjectivism. The covenant was viewed as a contract with faith and personal commitment being all important. For Torrance, this was wrong because baptism was an evangelical sacrament centred around Jesus Christ. The objective nature of baptism was paramount.

Having read these words from the Convenor himself and aware of his dislike for federal theology, as well as his strong support for incarnational redemption, it seems reasonable to suggest that his influence, particularly in this report, was substantial. This is furthered by a question asked by a Commissioner in relation to the constitution of the Commission. When he was told that thirty-five ministers in total represented the Commission, the Commissioner took the opportunity to suggest that "from the appearance of this piece of historical theological research I suggest that it is possible that one or two, not thirty-five, did this work."[347] Torrance disagreed, maintaining that "most members of the commission read the papers and go into the matter." He admitted however, that "it falls on the

[342] Verbatim Minute of the General Assembly, 1958.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Ibid.
[347] Ibid.

Convener to write the material up."[348] Whilst only sparse minutes are available of the Special Commission's meeting during 1957 and 1958, and these do not suffice to discern the balance of contributions, the words of Donald MacLeod certainly indicate that much of what is written in the 1958 report corresponds with Torrance's theology:

> Many of his [Torrance's] criteria command instant respect: stress on the Trinitarian nature of God, the centrality of the incarnation, the primacy of grace and the urgency of evangelism. Other emphases, however, are less securely based, particularly the almost paranoid aversion to limited atonement, the profound distaste for Federal Theology, the stress on incarnational redemption, and the partiality to the idea that Christ's human nature was fallen.[349]

Limited atonement, federal theology and incarnational redemption are recurrent themes in this report, although the extent to which the prepositions are accurate are open to debate. Whilst highlighting that incarnational redemption is a "constant repetition" in Torrance's theological agenda, which Torrance attributes "to all his favourite (that is, non-Scholastic Calvinist) theologians from Knox to Boston," MacLeod suggests that "the documentary evidence precludes our believing that the idea ever occurred to any Scottish theologian prior to Edward Irving,"[350] who was a theologian in the early 19th century. Therefore, both Scott and MacLeod are critical of Torrance in regards to his attitude towards Scottish Calvinism and federal theology, with MacLeod going as far as to suggest that "Dr Torrance does not need to discredit the past to create space for his vision."[351] This will be explored in greater detail later. For now, it is important to recognise the trajectory that the Special Commission were on as they neared the end of their historical and theological overview, and acknowledge that much of this appears to have been influenced by Torrance.

The 1959 Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism

In the Commission's narrative, the tensions between the visible and invisible Church, the dominance of covenant theology and the relationship between Church and society, were themes that continued to unravel in the centuries that followed. The 1959 report of the Commission offers an historical overview from the time of the Disruption in 1843, to the year of the report, in 1959. This was a period of continued separation and splintering, evident in the provision of an overview that considers the Modern tradition, the Secession

[348] Ibid.
[349] Donald MacLeod, 'Dr T.F. Torrance and Scottish Theology: a Review Article,' in *Evangelical Quarterly* 72.1 (2000), 57.
[350] Ibid., 70.
[351] Ibid., 72.

and United Presbyterian Tradition, the Free Church Tradition, and the Church of Scotland Tradition, before comment on the Reunited Church of Scotland. In its closing pages, the report also considers Baptist teaching, and in doing so, reveals a great deal about the Commission's understanding of the Church. Significantly, the report affirms that

> From this review of the recent past the Commission believes that we can trace the elements of strength in each of the traditions that have now come together in the life of our national Church, and at the same time see the influences which have, at various points, tended to lead us in mistaken directions.[352]

In exploring the 1959 report, this section will highlight the ecclesiological strengths of each tradition, as perceived by the Commission, as well as underline the mistakes it believed had been made, in order to present the unfolding and established understanding of the Church of Scotland by 1959.

Within the opening section of the report, dealing with the Modern tradition, the Commission reiterate the problems and tensions indicated at the end of the 1958 report. It then went on to praise the work of the Calvin Translation Society. By making Calvin's work available in English, this society, suggests the Commission, had helped to stir "up in all branches of the Church an understanding of Christ and the Gospel akin to that of the Scots Reformers," leading "to an increasingly evangelistic and missionary outlook which helped to undermine the rationalistic tendencies of Federal Theology … and the moralism of the Moderates."[353] Having reiterated the Commission's (or rather, Torrance's priorities), the report returns to its historical narrative, highlighting the "dominant spiritual climate of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" which the Commission saw as emphasising the "individual's 'immediate' experience of the divine," as well as the "cult of religious moralism," which had emerged as a result of the "tendency towards subjectivism in theology and philosophy" in Europe.[354] It was in this context that the Evangelical Revival, the rise of Liberalism, historical and critical investigation of the Bible and the revival of worship were to be understood.

In relation to baptism, the Commission suggest that, whilst the Evangelical Revival had, in some quarters, retained the Reformers' belief that "the preaching of the Word is the living action of Christ within the Church, convincing and converting men," elsewhere, people "tended to understand preaching primarily as instruction of the mind and heart, by the help of which men might come to an inward spiritual experience." As a consequence, the

[352] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1959, 631.
[353] Ibid., 632.
[354] Ibid.

Commission regretted that the understanding of the "sacraments as *acts of God* which are both *declaratory* of the Gospel and *instrumental in its application*" had been lost.[355] They were equally critical of Liberalism, and the way in which the sacraments became "acknowledged only for their value in popular education, as the outward, ritual and symbolic draping of spiritual truths."[356] Therefore, whilst the report acknowledges the positive way in which Liberalism "rediscovered the Kingdom of God … focused attention on the historical Jesus … and led the way in the field of Biblical study," it also criticises the way in which the Church was regarded "largely as a social institution."[357] Within the Church itself, the study of the Bible was considered by the Commission to have had the "most far-reaching importance" as far as Baptism was concerned.[358] This was a result of the emphasis upon returning the Church back to "Christ Himself … and to a doctrine of the Church and sacraments governed by what He has done for us."[359] Whilst not escaping the subjectivism of the time, the Commission believed that the renewed interest in worship, most noticeable with the re-publication of Knox's *Book of Common Order* in 1840, had also "laid emphasis on the primacy of God's action."[360] As a consequence, the sacraments had come once again to be "seen as a means of grace," although the revival was unable to "free itself altogether from the false Roman conception of indwelling grace," evident in its liturgy.[361] Finally, to contextualise their analysis, the Commission affirm that the "old Presbyterian tradition," with its scholastic Calvinism and Westminster Standards, "continued to have a strong influence until the beginning of [the twentieth] century."[362] It is evident that the Commission considered the return to the Gospel and the primacy of God's action in the sacrament to be strengths, whilst the emphasis upon the subjective, inward experience of the individual, was considered to be a mistake. These strengths and weaknesses were to reappear in their discussions of other traditions; they are very revealing of the Commission's understanding of baptism, but they also have profound ecclesiological implications.

Within the Secession and United Presbyterian Tradition, the Commission observed that the *Original Secession Testimony* of 1827 and 1842 had been used until the union which brough about the United Presbyterian Church.[363] Thereafter, the *Presbyterian Forms of*

[355] Ibid.
[356] Ibid., 633.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Ibid.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid., 634.
[363] Ibid.

Service introduced in 1891 to order Church practice. Following the New Testament example, baptism was considered to "represent and seal Christ, and all the benefits of the covenant of grace to believers (II. Xviii. Ii)."[364] It thus constituted the Church. With this emphasis upon forgiveness of sins and regeneration, baptism was also not only held to be accessible, to "those who profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to Him, but also the infants of such as are members of the visible Church are to be baptized."[365] Here, the report singles out the work of Principal David S. Cairns, who supported infant baptism in light of Jesus' blessing of the children, asking if Jesus "did this with His human body of flesh and blood, ought not the Christian Church which is His body, do it too?"[366] For Cairns, God's grace is paramount, and the baptism of children is justified because of God's covenant of grace:

> God declares that children are included in His Covenant; our Lord Jesus Christ says that they are of the Kingdom of Heaven; the Apostle Peter testifies that the promise is not only to believers but also to their children; the Apostle Paul testifies that the children of believers are holy unto the Lord.[367]

However, despite the support for infant baptism and the upholding of the covenant of grace found in the theology of Cairns and others, the report also points to the fact that the notion of original sin and the theology of union with Christ tends to focus more upon "an inward experience rather than […] the objective fact which has already taken place in Christ."[368] The Commission's concern is that this emphasis upon the subjective places stress upon the idea of new birth, which it argued was a "prominent feature of the baptismal teaching in [the United Presbyterian] tradition."[369] In order to "obtain regeneration, faith, repentance," an individual must be "born of water and of the Spirit," otherwise they cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Thus, grace "blots out sin," but faith must receive that grace in order for it to be effective.[370]

Turning to the Free Church tradition, the Commission drew attention to the influence that scholastic Calvinism and Federal theologians had on its theology and thinking, and to the unresolved tensions that ensued. This was a result of the

[364] Ibid.
[365] Ibid.
[366] Ibid., 635.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid., 635-636.
[370] Ibid., 636.

> renewed conflict between those who maintained irresistible grace and election … and those who believed in a strictly conditional offer of the Gospel requiring active human co-operation for the efficacy of grace.[371]

From an ecclesiological perspective, the discussions related to infant baptism are the most revealing and useful for highlighting the tensions that arose. The report compares and contrasts the theology of James Bannerman and James S. Candlish. Bannerman stressed the cognitive aspect of baptism, but also highlighted the importance of co-operation and response through faith which was increasingly evident in the theology of the Free Church. He could consequently affirm that baptism was a "positive institution of Christ in His Church," an "external and sensible sign of an internal grace, a spiritual truth embodied in outward action," and "a seal of a federal transaction between two parties in the ordinance."[372] Whilst not refuting the practice of infant baptism, he argued that:

> Baptism in the case of all infants baptized gives to them an interest in the Church of Christ as its members … Baptism does not constitute him a member of the Kingdom of heaven, but it brings him to the very door, and bids him there knock and it shall be opened unto him … Baptism, in the case of all infants baptized, gives them a right of property in the covenant of grace; which may in after life, by means of their personal faith, be supplemented by a right of possession.[373]

In this understanding, baptism is considered to be an initiation into the Church, but it is faith alone that welcomes the baptized believer over the threshold and into the Kingdom of heaven, enabling them to possess fully the benefits of the covenant.

A contrast to this conditional view is offered by Candlish, who, the Commission suggest, replaced "the abstract Federal idea" with "a more Biblical conception of the covenant will of God the Father."[374] For this reason, the report affirms, Candlish was able to develop "a fuller and stronger doctrine of the Church as the fellowship of those who are united to Christ as His Body," insisting that "there is only 'one Church which in different aspects is invisible and visible.'"[375] Indeed, Candlish affirmed that baptism was the "great symbol of the unity of the Church of Christ under one head," arguing that in the one baptism, people are not "incorporated … into any local or sectional Church only, but into the one holy Catholic Church of Christ."[376] Accordingly, he believed that the covenant and its promises included children, and that the "objection to infant baptism" was the result of the "*erroneous assumption that Baptism is a sign and seal of the personal salvation of those*

[371] Ibid.
[372] Ibid., 638.
[373] Ibid.
[374] Ibid., 639.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid., 640.

who receive it." Therefore, whilst maintaining the importance of faith as a response to baptism, he acknowledged the activity of God, the passive nature of the baptized, the importance of the incarnation and the union and communion with Christ that is brought about through baptism.[377]

Whilst the report makes it clear that theology and practice were not always in accord, the Commission note that in *A New Directory for the Public Worship of God* (1898), issued by the Free Church and the *Directory and Forms for Public Worship* (1909) and the *Book of Common Order* (1928), both issued by the United Free Church (which brought together the Free and United Presbyterian traditions), the emphasis was placed upon the action of the parents and congregation in bringing the child for baptism and dedication, rather than on the action of God.[378] Thus, "instead of speaking directly of the relation of the child to Christ and His work," the *Book of Common Order*

> says that children belong, with us who believe, to the membership of the Church through the covenant made in Christ, and confirmed to *us* by God in this sacrament, which is a sign and seal of *our* cleansing, of *our* ingrafting into Christ, and of *our* welcome into the household of God.[379]

Here, children were considered to be part of the covenant, belonging to the membership of the Church through the faith of the Church; however, the conditional nature of this relationship, as taught by federal theology, persisted, so that a response of faith in later years was also seen as important.

In the Church of Scotland, the report suggests "three distinct lines of tradition are discernible": old evangelicalism, a revival of Westminster Calvinism and a revival of High Church Calvinism.[380] Whilst in some respects more emphasis began to be placed upon God's word and activity, the retention of the cognitive aspect of baptism led to "highly intellectualist conception of faith."[381] From an ecclesiological perspective, this led to some striking developments, not least in relation to the covenant and infant baptism.

In the Church of Scotland tradition, the Commission highlight the work of a group of key theologians: Principal Dewar of Aberdeen; Thomas J. Crawford, Professor of Edinburgh University; and H. J. Wotherspoon and J. M. Kirkpatrick, the authors of *A Manual of*

[377] Ibid., 641.
[378] Ibid., 643.
[379] Ibid., 644.
[380] Ibid.
[381] Ibid.

Church Doctrine. Dewar was from the evangelical tradition, and although he maintained that baptism was related to the covenant and represented union with Christ, he also believed that there was a difference between regeneration and conversion. Consequently, he affirmed:

> The washing of regeneration is indeed common to all who are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; [but] the grace of regeneration, of which these are the sacraments or signs, by which the members of Christ's body are regenerated with their head, is not common to all; for heretics and false brethren, in the communion of the Catholic name, have the same Baptism as ourselves ([Augustine] *Enarr. In Ps.*, lxxvii).[382]

Here, a clear distinction is made between those who after baptism experience a conversion of heart and "lay hold of the covenant," and those who do not.[383] The consequence for infant baptism was that, although it could be administered, Dewar saw it effectively as a preliminary step to faith, "designed to show that [infants] are capable of being subjects of Christ's Kingdom, and of partaking of its blessings."[384] This position was taken a step further by Crawford, who was representative of the Federal and rational tradition. Emphasising "the conditions, limitations and requirements of the Federal contract," Crawford argues that "God's kindness" is only extended to the baptised in so far as they fulfil their side of the deal.[385] Therefore, Crawford can affirm that:

> It is true that all persons who make a credible profession of Christianity are entitled to the sacraments, in the judgement of the visible Church. And in regard to Baptism, the infants of professed believers share in this respect in the outward privileges of their parents. But whether they be entitled to the sacraments in the judgement of the Head of the Church is altogether a different question. If He does not recognize them as being already, or as destined ultimately to become, sincere believers, then they have no real interest, either present or prospective, in the covenant of grace (*The Fatherhood of God*, p.261).[386]

The report is critical of the consequent limitation of the sovereign grace of God, suggesting that the result of Crawford's theology is to make "the mercy of the visible Church much wider than the mercy of Christ," and "the real content of Baptism what we ultimately put into it."[387] The Commission are also critical of the ways in which Crawford's view seemed to lose the efficacious nature of baptism, and to tend towards seeing baptism as "a mere form of admission into the visible Church" had grown; and it disliked the emphasis placed upon the faith of the Church as a means of blessing in infant baptism.[388] In contrast, the

[382] Ibid., 645.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Ibid.
[385] Ibid., 646.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Ibid.
[388] Ibid., 647.

Commission highlighted the faith and faithfulness of Christ, "who stands in for the child in a vicarious relationship," thus rebuking "Roman" understanding of implicit faith.[389]

Within the High Church Calvinist movement, exemplified in the writings of Wotherspoon and Kirkpatrick, baptism is seen as more than entry into the visible Church. Instead, there is an emphasis upon baptism offering "the *fulfilled* covenant in Christ," which in turn relates "directly to the *Incarnation*."[390] Baptism is seen not as having benefit "merely for the admission of the person baptized into the visible Church," because "Baptism is 'into Christ.'"[391] Here, a strong connection is made between the body of Christ and the Church. Infant baptism is upheld, but as before, the covenantal nature of baptism calls for a response, and it is considered "more obviously necessary where Baptism has been received in infancy."[392] This expectation is perhaps most apparent in the service books from the period, including *The Order of Public Worship and the Administration of the Sacrament*, produced by Robert Lee and the *Euchologion*, produced by the Church Service Society in 1867. The Commission note that Lee had "reintroduced into the service the question originally put by Knox: 'Do you here present this child to be baptized, desiring that he may be engrafted into the mystical body of Jesus Christ?'"[393] However, the *A Book of Common Order* (1869) had omitted that question, and instead changed it to, "Do you present this child to God in the holy sacrament of Baptism?"[394] Thus, whilst the instructions that followed maintained that "this sacrament thus instituted is a holy sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of our ingrafting into Christ and union with Him, or remission of sins, regeneration, adoption and life eternal," there was a sense, suggested by the Commission, that by the twentieth century, the emphasis in this strand of theology had come to be on "Baptism as an act of dedication": a human action directed towards God.[395]

Turning to the Church of Scotland's liturgy, the Commission concluded that in *A Book of Common Order* (1869), the Reformed and Westminster traditions were combined.[396] This, together with the absence of any reference to grace being channelled through the sacraments of the Church,[397] reveals the understanding of baptism – and indeed of ecclesiology – in the early twentieth century in the Church of Scotland:

[389] Ibid.
[390] Ibid.
[391] Ibid., 648.
[392] Ibid., 649.
[393] Ibid., 650.
[394] Ibid.
[395] Ibid., 651.
[396] Ibid., 650.
[397] Ibid.

> And as by Baptism we are solemnly received into the church, we are taught, and acknowledge thereby, that all men are born in sin, and must be cleansed by Christ's blood and Spirit if they would be accepted of God and admitted to His heavenly kingdom. The Baptism of water cannot of itself effect that which it signifies, but as it is a sign appointed by divine wisdom to show us our need of heavenly cleansing, so it is also a seal whereby God confirms to all who are baptized His promise to bestow it; assuring them thereby of His goodwill and love, ingrafting them into the body of Christ, receiving them into His household, and giving them a covenant right to look to Him as their Father, and to expect through faith all the blessing of salvation.

These traditions were not distinct, and with the reunion in 1929, the baptismal theologies prevalent within the various traditions had merged and blended, yet some of the old tensions remained. The report comments on the on-going debate between the "Christological theology of [the] Reformers and the forensic tendencies of the Westminster divines," as well as the strained relationship between those it described as "hyper-Calvinists and semi-Pelagian moralists."[398] Yet, despite these difficulties, the Commission affirms that the post-1929 Church of Scotland showed "signs of real hunger for Biblical teaching, for doctrinal substance, for informed worship, and for instructed evangelism."[399] They applauded the sense that the sacraments were once again beginning to find their substance in Christ, affirming that "only through the evangelical doctrines of Christ's Incarnation and Atonement can we resolve our tensions, and set forth a true and faithful doctrine of Baptism adequate to guide our worship, instruction, and evangelism."[400]

As the report moves into its closing section, exploring the Church of Scotland and Baptist teaching, there is a sense in which many of the beliefs expressed related to the strengths and weaknesses of the various traditions are consolidated, and in offering comment and critique of the Baptist teaching on baptism, the Commission reveal their own ecclesiological understanding. This section of the report focuses first on, the differences between understandings of membership – including the Baptist notion of 'closed' and 'open' membership, and the liberty of each individual Baptist Church to determine – and Baptist attitudes towards infant baptism. The Commission commented that despite some fundamental differences they find common ground in the statement about Baptism from the 1951 Baptist World Alliance:

> Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, or dipped, a sign of our entrance into the covenant of grace, and ingrafting into the body of Christ, which is His Church; and of the remission of sin

[398] Ibid., 651.
[399] Ibid., 652.
[400] Ibid.

> in the blood of Christ, and of our fellowship in His death and resurrection, and of our living, or rising to newness of life (Article xxviii., *The Doctrine of Baptism*).[401]

The Commission suggest that much of this agreement arose from the influence of the Westminster Standards, which had provided a source of agreement and unity. However, exploring Baptist theology further, the report comments that "the nature of our divergence is more serious,"[402] not least with regard to the nature of the Church. Quoting Wheeler Robinson, the report asserts that in Baptist teaching, "the Church is a spiritual society composed of converted men who acknowledge the supreme Lordship of Christ," whilst another Baptist, H. Cook, believes that "the Church is a society of believers and of believers only, and entrance into it is conditioned by the free acceptance of God's grace in Christ."[403] The report suggests that this belief is based upon the concept of the New Covenant superseding the Old, with the result that a New Israel was created, made up of men and women who

> were no longer to be numbered in the *ecclesia* of God because of birth into a particular nation to which the promises of the covenant had been given. They now [became] members of the *ecclesia* solely by virtue of their personal faith in Jesus Christ, and their individual response to His call.[404]

With this emphasis upon personal faith and response, the Commission argued that the Baptists had identified the Church with the *visible institution*, comprised of the remnant of true believers, whose duty it was to "create a visible Church of perfect purity."[405] This not only stressed the outward experience of being 'born again,' but also defined the Church according to this experience rather than in relation to Christ.[406]

Countering this view, the Commission argued that the "New Testament does not separate the Church of the Old Testament from the Church of the New Testament," but instead regards the New, in and through Jesus Christ, as a fulfilment of the promises of the Old.[407] It reiterated the way in which the Reformed tradition had defined the Church according to three frontiers: Christ, the faithful response of believers, and election. The last of these, known only to God, defines the true remnant or invisible Church. However, in Baptist theology, the report suggests, "there is a strong tendency to make believer's Baptism the

[401] Ibid., 653.
[402] Ibid., 654.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid.
[405] Ibid.
[406] Ibid.
[407] Ibid., 656.

sole frontier of the perfect visible Church."[408] As a consequence, the Baptists believe that the baptism of infants who are "incapable of offering a personal confession of faith subverts the conception of the Church as the fellowship of believers,"[409] and that the blessing of the children at the hands of Jesus demonstrates that "His kingdom is wider than His Church."[410] Turning to consider original sin, election, the faithfulness of Christ and the efficacy of God's grace, the Commission concludes that the influence of federal theology can be seen in Baptist theology, particularly in its distinction between redemption and salvation and its view that the latter is dependent upon an individual's "personal decision, regeneration, or conversion."[411] This position it believes to be a consequence of the absence of the doctrine of election, the report affirms the Reformed view that regeneration "is the renewal of humanity in Christ, in which we are given to share," whereas for Baptists it is "that new and additional experience which each individual must have *in himself* before he is saved."[412] The Commission therefore believe that in Baptist theology, "Baptism has become an almost completely man-centred act, in which the significant thing is what the believer does to make visible and external certain internal decisions and experiences of his own."[413] This they view as a misleading understanding of the sacrament.

The 1959 report marked the end of the Special Commission's historical overview of the development of the doctrine of baptism. The conclusions reached in this report were consistent with the findings of the earlier reports, and it passed through the General Assembly with no general discussion. However, this could also have been due to the absence of the Convenor who was in America. The Commission's Secretary, the Rev J. Heron, presented the report on the Convener's behalf, highlighting that his "knowledge of the literature is much less full than that of Professor Torrance" and hoping that the Assembly would "not be too inquisitorial" in their questions.[414] From the report itself and from the opening statement it is apparent that the Special Commission was particularly eager that this report should correct what they perceived to be an erroneous understanding of grace, which had, in their opinion, resulted from Romanism, and in particular from a "conception of grace which, from the time of Saint Augustine, has been wrongly understood as 'the inflowing grace of the spirit which dwells in man, inheres in his soul

[408] Ibid., 655.
[409] Ibid.
[410] Ibid.
[411] Ibid., 658.
[412] Ibid., 659.
[413] Ibid., 658.
[414] Verbatim Minute of the General Assembly, 1959, 842.

and makes him will what God wills'."[415] This may well reflect Torrance's own concerns: in his baptismal theology he had been critical of Augustine and, in particular, of his definition of a sacrament. Within the Commission, sacraments seem to have been considered to be acts of God, and suggested that Augustine's error in understanding had been exacerbated by the "semi-palagian notion that 'the first beginning of faith' is due 'not to the grace of God, but to man's own free choice'." This idea had persisted "due to the causal misunderstanding of the grace of God and of the election of God;" it had failed to be checked by the Federal theology that had dominated the Scottish discussion of baptism from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.[416] In short, the Special Commission were once again keen to emphasise the objective, corporate and vicarious nature of baptism that witnessed the baptised initiated into the One Church, as opposed to the individualistic, objective, inward looking rite that they believed had developed in its place. Whilst believing that faith and personal response had a role, they were critical of any theology that placed these human-centred acts above Christ's primacy and agency, and they disapproved of any theology that believed that baptism could be understood as initiation into an exclusive, visible community of believers. Rather, the Special Commission believed that the visible and invisible church were held together and only God knows who the elect are. Consequently, and throughout their work, the Commission placed more emphasis upon the Doctrine of Christ and his faithfulness within baptismal theology, with a strong desire to hold together the relationship between incarnation and atonement, believing that the whole life of Christ is the objective, evangelical reality of the sacrament of baptism.

In the years that followed, the Special Commission submitted revised drafts of the Doctrine of Baptism, following their initial 1958 study document entitled, *The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism*. The Special Commission's reports of 1960 through to 1962 were abbreviated and revised versions of the same document, which outlined the doctrine of baptism under six main headings. These were: baptism and the gospel, the baptism of the individual, baptism as the source of new relationships, baptism and faith, baptism – in time and for eternity, and the administration of baptism. The 1962 report offered the fullest and final version of the doctrine. It considered the response of Presbyteries to the proposed doctrine which had been sent down to them under the Barrier Act, and had received both support and criticism. In 1962, the Special Commission reported:

> Of the fifty-one Presbyteries that sent comments to the Commission since last General Assembly, thirty-six have given the doctrinal statement their general

[415] Ibid., 847.
[416] Ibid., 850.

> approval, and less than half of the remaining fifteen have been seriously critical of essential points.[417]

The Commission expressed its gratitude for the responses and asserted that it had "wherever possible made use of these"[418] when producing this final report. However, the report conceded that there were some criticisms that they had been less inclined to accept. These represented the consequence of what the Commission viewed as two fundamental problems:

> (a) the attempt to find the meaning of Baptism in the external rite itself rather than in Christ, or (b) the lack of adequate discipline and instruction in the life of the Church.[419]

They believed that criticism and misunderstanding of the report had arisen because people had been "trying to interpret" the doctrine "from a standpoint that is quite alien to it."[420] This led the Commission to reiterate that they had "tried to expound the doctrine of Baptism in light of the Gospel itself, and in particularly in light of the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ."[421] Any other criticisms were attributed to "practical implications" where there was a "desire to administer Baptism unconditionally or indiscriminately," leading to the affirmation that the Commission were following the "correct procedure," letting "doctrine determine practice."[422] In regards to these practical implications, the Commission emphasised church discipline, suggesting that these difficulties stem "not so much from the nature of Baptism as from the whole Reformed conception of the Church."[423] This idea had been inferred by Torrance at the very beginning of the Commission's work. Thus, in this final section of chapter two, there follows an outline of the doctrine of baptism as submitted by the Special Commission, some personal comments and observations and an overview of the reception of the doctrine by the General Assembly.

The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism

Beginning with a preamble, the Commission's final report grounds baptism firmly within the Reformed tradition, highlighting the link between preaching and baptizing; emphasising that "the proclamation of the Gospel is the primary task of the Church," and

[417] Report of the Special Commission on Baptism to the General Assembly, 1962, 709.
[418] Ibid.
[419] Ibid., 710.
[420] Ibid.
[421] Ibid.
[422] Ibid.
[423] Ibid.

whilst the "proclamation of the Word can stand alone … the administration cannot, for it is dependent upon the promises of Christ."[424] Yielding primacy to *sola scriptura*, the report then states that "in administering Baptism the Church acts only as the servant of the Word of God," demonstrating that it seeks to be obedient to the authority of scripture and the command of Christ. It believes that "Baptism is both the act of Christ and the act of the Church," that "the rite of Baptism directs us and our children to the saving act of God's love which He has already fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ," and that ultimately the meaning of baptism "lies in Christ Himself, and not simply in the performance of the external rite."[425] Thus, as well as ensuring that no 'magic' or 'superstition' be associated with the administration of baptism, and firmly rejecting the idea of *ex opere operato*, there is a strong sense here, and throughout the report, that baptism is not only related to soteriology, but is also strictly Christo-centric and Trinitarian in nature. Moreover, baptism is always a response to God's agency, faithfulness and love in the past, present and future.

Baptism and the Gospel

The Christocentric and salvific nature is evident in the first section, which deals with Baptism and the Gospel, with Jesus' whole life – "His Birth, Baptism, Ministry, Sufferings, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and the Gift of the Holy Spirit,"[426] stressed as the central fact about baptism. In the belief that through Jesus' death and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost baptism is common to both Christ and the Church, the Oneness of baptism is affirmed. However, from the outset it is made clear that "Christ and the Church participate in the One Baptism in different ways – Christ actively and vicariously as Redeemer, the Church passively and receptively as the redeemed Community."[427] From there, the report moves to consider (a) John the Baptist, covenant promises, repentance and the new age, (b) Jesus, his consecrated Baptism, (which anointed him as a Messianic King) and his passion, and (c) the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, which dwells in the Church as the Body of Christ, empowering it to fulfil the command of Christ.[428] Consequently, the Report argues, "the church may baptize only where the Gospel is proclaimed and believed, only within the community where the mighty acts of God in Christ are effectively operative through the Word and Spirit."[429]

[424] Ibid., 712.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Ibid.
[427] Ibid.
[428] Ibid., 714.
[429] Ibid.

Baptism of the Individual

Having introduced the importance of the believing community and the oneness of baptism, the report focuses upon the baptism of the individual. Here, the subject of membership is established and the belief is affirmed that through baptism the individual becomes a member of Jesus' Body, a member of the new humanity, and is consecrated in Jesus "as [a] member[s] of the Messianic people of God."[430] Recognising that this membership is also about the covenant and the shared unity of the family of God, mention is made of the special place that children have in the command of Jesus and the household of faith,[431] directing attention back to Christ and emphasising that "the baptism of an individual is an initiation into and a sharing in the One Baptism common to Christ and his church."[432] Far from pointing towards an escape from this world, baptism here is seen as a corporate reality, resulting in new birth, through Christ's birth, that makes the baptised members of a new humanity, through the name of the Triune God.[433] Here, the ethical dimension of baptism is introduced: in baptism, the report suggests, we are no longer our own, and are pledged to live a life of faith and love in Jesus.[434] Indeed, the report confirms that "through Baptism we are made disciples of Christ, and are therefore called to discipleship."[435] This could suggest that baptism is not so much a rite of passage, but instead an on-going process of emergent faith-filled daily living. However, given that it is stressed that we can only receive baptism, "for we cannot add to Christ's finished work," the commitment that is expected in discipleship could be perceived as tentative; for if Christ has completed the work of salvation, then it could be suggested that the baptised become merely passive recipients, rather than active agents in transformation?

This seems to stand in tension with the report's earlier presentation of the ways in which Christ and the Church participate in the one baptism, which seems to confirm the passive and receptive nature of the baptised. In addition, the language of 'looking back' to Christ, which places the point of reference in the past, rather than pointing the newly baptised towards the future, mitigates against a sense of anticipation, expectation and hope in the lives of the baptised. It could be suggested that an emphasis on 'looking forward' would be

[430] Ibid.
[431] Ibid., 715.
[432] Ibid., 714.
[433] Ibid.
[434] Ibid., 715.
[435] Ibid., 715.

more likely to inspire active faith and the living out of love in light of the Kingdom of God.

Baptism and New Relationships

This is particularly important when the report deals with the new relationships that baptism creates in the community who embody the new humanity. Having suggested that in baptism God "takes hold of each of us in order to draw us within His redeeming and re-creating power,"[436] the report seeks to show how the baptised participate in the new covenant. Thus, it discusses the baptised adoption into God's family and Kingdom "under the sign of water", appointed by God, "to represent His cleansing and quickening power,"[437] giving primacy to its soteriological nature. This is followed by an account of the ways in which the Triune God relates to the baptised: (a) as children to a Father, (b) as members of Jesus' Body, and (c) as participants in the Communion of Saints through the Spirit; drawing attention to the renewal received through the Lord's Supper, the future dimension beyond earthly living, and the reconciliatory freedom found for the baptised within the life of God. This, in itself, is coherent, but the report deals fleetingly with the ways in which the children, the members of the Body, the citizens of heaven, should relate to one another. For although stating that "the act of God upon the individual in Baptism is not a solitary event,"[438] and that "through the communion of the Spirit we are not only members of Christ but members of one another,"[439] no mention is made of what this might look like in practice. Moreover, given the cosmic scope and nature of salvation, it is surprising that the report makes no mention whatsoever of the relationship of the baptized to creation.

Baptism and Faith

In the fourth section, which deals with baptism and faith, the gracious action and faithfulness of God are clearly paramount, and it is not surprising to read that: "baptism and faith belong inseparably together."[440] The report holds that baptism "is an act done to us"[441] by God, and that it is God's faithfulness that inspires the baptised to live obediently for the whole of life. Indeed, "only through this faith may we enter into full possession of

[436] Ibid.
[437] Ibid., 716.
[438] Ibid., 717.
[439] Ibid.
[440] Ibid.
[441] Ibid.

the new life,"[442] and to "be without faith would be to repudiate God by refusing to rely on His faithfulness in Christ."[443] However, this presentation of the urgency and importance of faith in the theology of baptism as a response to God, seems to contrast with the attestation earlier in the report that "in the teaching of Jesus the Kingdom of God, the sphere of divine blessing and forgiveness into which we are incorporated in Baptism, belongs in a special way to little children."[444] It was also more than a little controversial at the time, given the debates about the relative merits of believer's baptism and paedobaptism that were already beginning to take place in the Church of Scotland. After all, it was the issue of infant baptism that had prompted the Commission's work. The report did nothing to resolve the tension between the importance of faith and the unconditional nature of God's grace, arguing that the latter was essential to growing in knowledge of God, whilst mindful that the baptised do not lead a sinless life. Here, it is clear, the eschatological nature of baptism means "watching and praying and waiting upon God" whilst leading "a life of penitence and ever-renewed forgiveness."[445] In this section, the future facet of baptism is to the fore.

Baptism – In Time and For Eternity

Eschatology is prominent in the fifth section that dealt with "Baptism – in time and for eternity" – although questions about faith, responsibility and infant baptism are still explored. This section centres on remembering the promises of God, arguing:

> we are buried with [Jesus] in His death, and our life in sin finds its judgement and its end. Therefore Baptism is administered only once, as in irrevocable seal of that finished work of Christ … [and] … from this new beginning the baptized look forward to the End.[446]

The once and for all nature of baptism is here associated with atonement and sin: Christ's death and resurrection crushes the darkness and offers renewal and life in all its fullness. References to the Old Adam are evidently pointers towards original sin, and talk of Christ's work and the cross highlights "that God will not go back upon His promises"; therefore "Baptism remains the pledge of God's forgiveness to all who seek it by faith."[447] Yet, in the anticipation of 'the End', the report warns that baptism "becomes the sign of judgement to the unrepentant" when "it is despised by neglect of its blessings,

[442] Ibid., 717-718.
[443] Ibid., 717.
[444] Ibid., 715.
[445] Ibid., 718.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Ibid.

or repudiated by unbelief."[448] These assertions sit somewhat uncomfortably with the acceptance of infant baptism, which at times appears to have a set of doctrinal principles which are different from those applied to adult baptism. This is not only in relation to Augustinian theology, individualism and rescue from the world, but also in the ethical question of accountability. If it is true that forgiveness is reliant on faith and that "the obligations involved in Baptism are such that none dare become complacent regarding his state of salvation,"[449] then it has to be asked whether it is right for anyone to baptise anybody without their consent. For the Commission, that question could be answered by pointing to Jesus Christ and the faith of the church community, who would be responsible for nurturing the growth of faith. Thus, despite the fact that an earlier report had clearly stated that in baptism, "what is given may be refused; what is grafted may wither; what is generated may never grow,"[450] in light of prevenient grace, it was held that the discriminate baptism of infants was permissible.

The Administration of Baptism

Considering the administration of baptism, the Report asserts first that "only those who are lawfully ordained to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments are lawfully authorized to administer Baptism."[451] The Commission goes on to affirm the oneness of baptism, and suggests that "because baptism is bound up not only with preaching but with teaching, it is to be administered only where there is provision, promise, and assurance that the baptized will be brought up in the family of God and instructed in the Christian faith."[452] Thus, the "proper place" of baptism is "in the midst of the worshipping people of God, where the mighty acts of Christ are proclaimed, and where, through the Word, the Spirit is effectively at work."[453] This was in keeping with Reformation thinkers such as Calvin who believed that infant baptism demonstrated God's grace and movement towards us, as well as the importance of the faith of the fellowship and sponsors for the nurturing of children and adults alike. In consequence, in the report, the Church of Scotland affirms that whether baptism was "administered to children or to adults, it is administered with the same doctrine."[454] The Commission and its report dropped the language of the 'right' of a child to be baptized, which had been prevalent in the 1933 Act, and agreed that baptism may be

[448] Ibid.
[449] Ibid.
[450] Report of the Special Commission on Baptism to the General Assembly, 1960, 691.
[451] Report of the Special Commission on Baptism to the General Assembly, 1962, 719.
[452] Ibid.
[453] Ibid.
[454] Ibid.

administered to a child whose parents, one or both, had been baptized, were in full communion with the church or adherents, or professed the Christian faith. Notwithstanding its emphasis on the importance of baptism, the report ended by quoting the Westminster Confession of Faith, highlighting that whilst baptism does not guarantee renewal, salvation is still possible without baptism:

> Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated (*West. Conf*. xxxviii. 5).[455]

Following the final reception of the report in 1963, the Church of Scotland then drafted, accepted and enacted Act XVII 1963. In regards to who could be baptised, the Act stated:

> 1.Baptism may be administered to a child –
>
> (1) whose parents, one or both, have themselves been baptized, are in full communion with the Church, and undertake the Christian upbringing of the child;
> (2) whose parents, one or both, having been baptized but not in full communion, are such that the Kirk Session is satisfied that he or she is an adherent permanently connected with the congregation and supporting the work and worship of the Church and will undertake the Christian upbringing of the child;
> (3) whose parents, one or both, have themselves been baptised, profess the Christian faith, undertake to ensure that such child grows up in the life and worship and express the desire to seek admission to full membership of the Church. In such cases the Kirk Session shall appoint the Elder of the District in which the parent resides, or some other person, to shepherd them into full communion and to exercise pastoral care of the child concerned.
> (4) who, being of unknown parentage, or otherwise separated from his or her parents, is in the view of the Kirk Session under Christian care and guardianship.[456]

This upheld the importance of adequate assurance that in the case of infant baptism the child would be raised in the faith. It maintained that baptism would be administered by ordained clergy and only after proper provision for instruction regarding the meaning of baptism. It also sought to ensure that parish boundaries were respected, advising that "no Minister may administer Baptism in a case where to his knowledge another Minister has declined to do so" without the consent of Presbytery.[457] It laid down that, unless in exceptional circumstances, baptism should take place at a diet of public worship where "the parents or guardians are members or adherents."[458] All of this, along with the declaration that baptism was to be "administered in the Name of the Father and of the Son,

[455] Ibid.
[456] Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1962, 722.
[457] Ibid., 722.
[458] Ibid.

and of the Holy Ghost, with water, by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion,"[459] was in keeping with the *Westminster Confession*, Chapter XXVIII 'Of Baptism'; especially when it came to the question of baptism and salvation, and its justification of infant baptism, on the grounds that the efficacy of baptism is not bound to any one moment in time, nor God's time (Westminster Confession, V and VI).

Taking all of this into consideration, it is clear that within the Church of Scotland, the Special Commission's 'Doctrine of Baptism' reinforced the soteriological, Christocentric and Trinitarian attributes of baptism that had been emphasised in all the reports, grounded it firmly within the faithfulness of God and emphasised its eschatological dimension. Yet, it could be suggested that it did little to explore the ways in which the new relationship established through baptism affected the baptised interaction with one another and creation. Its emphasis upon the church being passive recipients in baptism, belittled the opportunity to be active agents of transformative hope, and despite confirming the relationship between baptism and faith made no allowances in the Overture for the baptism of adults.

Between 1960 and 1963 discussion surrounding the doctrine was lively in the General Assembly and many concerns and criticisms were raised. In 1960 concern was raised over the understanding of covenant, with one Commissioner asking:

> Might I ask the Convener if it is the deliberate aim of the Committee to withdraw all references to Old Testament types and patterns, particularly as regards the First Covenant, the people of God in Israel?[460]

In response, Torrance answered "No," but proceeded to suggest that the New Testament uses the Old Testament "in order to direct us at once to Jesus Christ … therefore, we have sought to speak on the doctrine of Baptism in terms of fulfilled reality in Christ."[461] Remaining with the theme of covenant, another Commissioner asked a question pertaining to the subjects of baptism, asking whether that includes

> the children of parents who themselves have been baptised and no other incorporation into the fellowship has been received? That is, neither members of the Church but simply baptised persons?[462]

Torrance recognised that this was a particularly "serious question" and suggested that "we cannot separate the Church from Christ" and that to be baptised is to be a member of the

[459] Ibid., 723.
[460] Verbatim Minutes of the General Assembly, 1960, 1140.
[461] Ibid., 1141.
[462] Ibid., 1142.

church: "if Baptism has to do with direct relation to Christ then it is to do with direct membership of the Church."[463] He moves on to suggest that this was "one of the fundamental errors" in the Scottish kirk, when "the whole Church revolted strongly against the attachment of Baptism simply to the visible covenant and not to Christ."[464] Another error was in relation to Confirmation, as Torrance believed that there is "only one incorporation and that is the incorporation which took place when Jesus Christ incorporated himself into our humanity." Torrance proposed that this error "tended to be carried over into the evangelical church,"[465] with the result that

> There was held to be one incorporation which took place in Christ and another incorporation in addition to that which is effected in a conversion and the conversion is looked upon as another incorporation [and] to the high Churchmen sometimes in Scotland this had been spoken of as unsacramentally as "Baptism regeneration."[466]

The issue of regeneration was raised again in 1961, when the Convenor was asked to clarify the meaning of the Commission's assertion "baptised into Christ we are severed from the old stock of unregenerate human nature."[467] Torrance, once again, spoke about the baptised being "united to Christ and partakes of a new life and the regenerate life in Christ … the regeneration is not what takes place in here, but in Christ."[468] He reiterates that

> It is because Christ loves us all and has given Himself for us all that He has given us this that we may here accept the promise of Christ to unite us to Himself and to find our true life in Him and not in ourselves.[469]

In response, the Rev Heron, a member of the Commission, offered his support, stating that "the primary emphasis is not on the rite but on what Christ has done and suffered for us,"[470] and suggested that "the over narrow limitation of baptism to professed believers and the children of good Church members is as lacking in true theological justification as is the opposite practice of indiscriminate baptism."[471] The Christocentricity of baptism was paramount.

By 1962 concerns and criticisms raised by the General Assembly greatly increased. The link between Jesus' baptism and his death, along with the translation of *mysteria* to mean

[463] Ibid.
[464] Ibid.
[465] Ibid., 1143.
[466] Ibid., 1144.
[467] Verbatim Minute of the General Assembly, 1961, 1064.
[468] Ibid.
[469] Ibid., 1065.
[470] Ibid., 1070.
[471] Ibid.

sacramenta was questioned and deemed to be inaccurate.[472] Another Commissioner, whilst acknowledging the "very interesting and valuable observations on the subject of baptism" gathered by the Commission, nevertheless concluded that there "remains much in the report that we just simply cannot accept, it just does not seem to me to be true."[473] There was another criticism by a Commissioner who criticised the length of the Overture[474] and suggested that the "Commission had adopted a single line" and had thrown "aside all those who suggest that a normal line might be followed."[475] For others, the Overture seemed "far too rigid"[476] and did not take into consideration the fact that "there are far more exceptions than this Overture allows for."[477] Furthermore, on the question of faith and the condition that parents or guardians should participate in the life and worship of the church, there was disagreement.[478] The Commissioner who raised this issue questioned whether "we can really say that all those who are not at the moment sharing in the life and worship of the church have no faith?" and suggested that "if someone after careful warning is prepared to confess his faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour, who are we to say that his is dishonest in doing so?"[479] All of these were valid criticisms that were raised in 1963.

From the outset of the 1963 verbatim minutes of the General Assembly there is a sense that there is growing unease with the doctrine of baptism proposed by the Commission and their work as whole. A counter motion was proposed by the Rev Dr Thomson on the basis that the doctrine was "not simple, it is not clear, and it is not unambiguous," and therefore being such "a vital matter of the faith" could not be adopted.[480] Thomson highlighted that he was

> very much aware of the fact that there are many ministers, elders and workers in the Church who share the same deep disquiet that I have concerning what is proposed to be enacted as a doctrinal statement to go out as the only authoritative statement of the kind that this Church has made for many years.[481]

He was, he emphasised, not speaking "for any one school of thought," but instead recognised that "there are very many different angles of theological thought who are opposed to this being enacted as an Act of Assembly."[482] Whilst admitting that the doctrine

[472] Verbatim Minutes of the General Assembly, 1962, 1254-55.
[473] Ibid., 1272-73.
[474] Ibid., 1275.
[475] Ibid., 1277.
[476] Ibid., 1289.
[477] Ibid., 1290.
[478] Ibid., 1304.
[479] Ibid.
[480] Verbatim Minute of the General Assembly, 1963, 515.
[481] Ibid., 513.
[482] Ibid., 515.

was a "valuable document," for the theologian, he felt that it was unhelpful for "plain ordinary ministers" like himself. [483] In concluding, he reckoned that the percentage of Presbyteries who disagreed with the Commission (thirty percent) was a minority that was "too large and too significant for us to proceed," and moved the counter motion.

Unsurprisingly, Torrance responded by affirming that the document was "thoroughly evangelical," and suggested that lying behind this motion lay "a misunderstanding of the reformed evangelical position in regard to Baptism and in regard to forgiveness and regeneration."[484] Torrance maintained that the forgiveness of God was not conditional and once again affirmed the centrality of Jesus:

> If you look for the meaning of Baptism in Baptism then you will misunderstand the whole Report, but if you look for the meaning of Baptism in Jesus Christ then you will understand the Report, because this Report from beginning to end says Baptism is not a sacrament of what is done in your heart, it is a sacrament of the finished work of Jesus Christ which is given to you unconditionally by God.[485]

That may be so, but at the end of the discussion, the lack of clarity and agreement carried, with one Commissioner asking the Convenor "to consider that there are two other possibilities in my own inability to understand this statement [the doctrine of baptism], one is plain simple stupidity on my part, and the other is plain simple obscurity on his part."[486] When the vote was declared, the counter motion was carried, which stated:

> The General Assembly received the Overture anent the Doctrine of Baptism as set forth in Appendix II of the Report, take note that it has been accepted by a majority of Presbyteries as a valid statement of the Biblical and Reformed Doctrine of Baptism as contained in the primary and subordinate standards of the Church, and commend it to the earnest and prayerful consideration of ministers, office bearers and members.[487]

After years of diligent study and labour, the Special Commission had produced a doctrine that had passed as a statement of the doctrine of baptism, but had failed to have that doctrine recognised as an authoritative act. The aim of unifying baptismal practice by regulating doctrinal meaning had fallen short and ultimately failed. The possible reasons why, along with an evaluation of the extent to which the terms of the 1963 Act followed from the work of the Commission, will be explored in the next chapter.

[483] Ibid., 516.
[484] Ibid., 519.
[485] Ibid., 527.
[486] Ibid., 531.
[487] Ibid., 532.

Chapter Three

Sacramental and covenantal theology according to the Reformed tradition and the Special Commission

In chapter one it was suggested that part of the reason the Special Commission's work and reports were not received well by the General Assembly and wider church, was because they moved away from a Reformed understanding of baptism. In particular, Wright maintained that this was bound up with the Commission's emphasis upon the one, all inclusive, vicarious baptism of Christ for all people. Scott also proposed that the Commission, under the influence of Torrance, had replaced a covenantal paradigm with an incarnational one. From the above, it is now apparent that Torrance's distinctive baptismal understanding appears frequently in the reports of the Commission and it is evident that Torrance's emphasis upon Christ's incarnation is a theme that frequently appears. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to assess whether or not the Special Commission moved away from a Reformed understanding of baptism. This will be done by comparing and contrasting the Commission's understanding of sacramental theology and covenantal theology with that of the Reformers. In doing so, the extent to which the terms of Act XVII 1963 followed from the Commission's reports will be considered.

With the exception of (in some translations) Ephesians 5.32, the word sacrament itself does not appear in the bible and given its enigmatic nature it is unsurprising to discover that the term "was first used to denote things that had previously been described in Greek as 'the mysteries.'"[1] Keen to distance Christianity from what Ross Thompson has called the "pagan connotations of the mystery cults,"[2] it was Tertullian, in the early third century, who was the "first Latin writer to use the term sacrament in a theological way."[3] As Thompson notes, the Latin word *sacramentum*, which had connotations in Roman society of "a sacred pledge of sincerity or fidelity," was used to translate the Greek *mysterion*, which referred to "hidden realities or specifically to sacred rites" found in the Eastern mystery religions.[4] As the theology developed, a dichotomy between the inward and the outward sacramental nature of baptism was established, and the Latin word *mysterium* was used "to refer to the inner meaning," while "*sacramentum* to the outward rite."[5] Whilst it

[1] Ross Thompson, *SCM Study Guide to the Sacraments* (London: SCM Press 2006), 12.
[2] Ibid., 15.
[3] Kenan B. Osborne, *Sacramental Theology: A General Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press 1988), 22.
[4] J. Martos, "Sacrament," in Alan Richardson and John Bowden (eds), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press 1983), 514.
[5] Thompson, *SCM Study Guide to the Sacraments*, 15.

was Tertullian who joined the notion of allegiance and loyalty with the visible sign of a sacramental rite, it has been suggested that it "is only when we come to Augustine … that we find a true sacramental theology." The phrase "a sacrament is a visible and outward sign of an inward and invisible grace" is often attributed to Augustine, yet a more accurate account of his definition might be to say that a sacrament is "a sign of something sacred" (Letters, 138, 1),[6] "a *sacrum signum* or a *verbum visibile* (a sacred sign or visible word)."[7] In his writings Augustine makes a distinction between sacraments of the word and sacraments of action, and he certainly conveys the notion that each sacrament conveys a sacred reality. However, without the grace offered by God, Augustine maintains that the sacraments remain only signs. Indeed, he suggests that God sanctifies

> by invisible grace through the Holy Spirit, wherein is the whole fruit of the visible sacraments; for without that sanctification of invisible grace, what use are visible sacraments?[8]

Augustine was not alone in believing that the sacraments required the activity of God in order to have spiritual significance. The connection between the activity of God through the sacraments and grace became particularly evident in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and is prominent in the theological writings of Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, resulting in the medieval notion that the sacrament worked *ex opere operato*. Hugh of St. Victor was able to suggest that

> if any one wishes to define more fully and more perfectly what a sacrament is, he can say: "a sacrament is a corporeal or material element set before the senses without, representing by similitude and signifying by institution and containing by sanctification some invisible and spiritual grace."[9]

Likewise, Peter Lombard maintained that

> Something is properly called a sacrament because it is a sign of God's grace, and is such an image of invisible grace that it bears its likeness and exists as its cause.

And whilst Aquinas believed that "God [had] not 'chained' divine grace to the sacraments,[10] he nevertheless affirmed that the sacraments were instruments of God, used to channel divine grace through their administration:

> If we hold that a sacrament is an instrumental cause of grace, we must needs allow that there is in the sacraments a certain instrumental power of bringing about the sacramental effects…[11]

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[6] Martos, "Sacraments," 515.
[7] Osborne, *Sacramental Theology: A General Introduction*, 23.
[8] Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch*, III, 84 (ca.410*)* cited by Maxwell E. Johnson, (ed), *Sacraments and Worship: Key readings in the history and theology of Christian worship from the New Testament to the present* (Great Britain: SPCK 2012), 3.
[9] Hugh of St.Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, I, 9 (1140) cited by Johnson, *Sacraments and Worship: Key readings*, 5.
[10] Aquinas, S. th. III, q. 64, ad 7c, cited by Herbert Vorgrimler in *Sacramental Theology* (Collegville, Minn: Liturgical Press 1992), 21.

Thus, by the dawning of the sixteenth century, amidst all the variant theological opinions, there was a sense in which the sacraments were understood to have an outward and visible nature, as well as an inner and spiritual dimension; and were believed to be causatively effective, working *ex opere operato*. In and through their proper administration and performance, the sacraments were deemed to mediate and be a sign of grace, and the liturgical elements that both preceded and proceeded from any sacramental activity, attested to the benefits that the sacrament was believed to bring about. In the case of baptism, the essentials, which included exsufflation, blessing and giving of salt, exorcism, anointing with oil, the giving of white robes or cap and the reception of a lit candle,[12] all testified to the purification of the baptised, the forgiveness of sins, and new life made real by the sacrament. For the Reformers, this was to prove problematic.

In some ways the sacramental theology of the Reformers was in continuity with the medieval church. For instance, very few would have argued against the notion that baptism was about new life and forgiveness of sins. Yet, when it came to the question of efficacious grace, the Special Commission were correct to suggest that discontinuity was very much apparent. The Council of Trent (1545-63), which in many ways was responding to the theological points raised by the Reformers, reaffirmed the Roman Catholic affirmation of seven sacraments:[13] baptism, confirmation, ordination, marriage, reconciliation or penance, the last rites and Holy Communion, and confirmed them as efficacious means of grace. The Reformers, in contrast, maintained that there were only two: baptism and the Lord's Supper; rejected, as Martos puts it, "scholastic explanations of the mediation of grace through ecclesiastical rituals" and applied "more stringent scriptural criteria to the claim of dominical institution."[14] Some even went as far as rejecting the term 'sacrament,' in favour of 'divine ordinance.'[15] This was the Reformers' response to what they perceived to be the need to rid the church of its superstitious practices, which, in their reading, implied that the sacrament's efficacy flowed "from the minister's merit or from a quasi-magical *ex opere operato* that, as it were, 'obligates' God to dispense grace whenever the sacrament is validly enacted by an authorized agent."[16] In rejecting the

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[11] Aquinas, S. th. III, q.62, cited by Johnson, *Sacraments and Worship: Key readings*, 9.
[12] Bryan D. Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the New Testament to the Council of Trent* (London: SCM Press Ltd 2006), 136-137
[13] Martos, "Sacraments," 515.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Thompson, *SCM Study Guide to the Sacraments*, 53.
[16] Nathan Mitchell, "Sacrament," in Paul F. Bradshaw (ed), *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: SCM Press 2002), 414.

objectification of the sacrament, the Reformers sought to restore the premise that the sacraments were signs of God's grace, whilst at the same time holding that in and of themselves and detached from God's word, these symbols could in no way be considered to be means of divine grace. The First Helvetic Confession (1536) – composed by a group of Swiss theologians who excluded John Calvin, including Heinrich Bullinger (Zurich), Kasper Megander (Bern), Martin Bucer and and Wolfgang Capito (Strasbourg) – discusses the efficacy of the sacraments, highlighting this tension:

> The signs [zeychen], which are called sacraments, are two, namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sacraments are significant, holy signs of elevated and secret things [hoher und heymlicher dingen]. However, they are not merely empty signs, but consist of both the sign and substance. For in baptism the water is the sign, but the substance and spiritual thing is rebirth and admission into the people of God …As the signs are physically received, so these substantial, invisible, and spiritual things are received in faith. In addition, the entire power, efficacy, and fruit of the sacraments lies in these spiritual and substantial things. For this reason, we confess that the sacraments are not simply outward signs of Christian fellowship. On the contrary, we confess them to be signs of divine grace by which the ministers of the Church work with the Lord for the purpose and to the end which He Himself promises, offers and efficaciously provides. We confess, however, that all sanctifying and saving power is to be ascribed to God, the Lord alone.[17]

Therefore, whilst emphasis is placed upon God's agency in ensuring the efficaciousness of the sacrament, the importance of receiving the sacrament in faith is highlighted.

The First Helvetic Confession highlights the mysterious nature of the sacraments, as well as the question of sign and substance, and the manner in which the reality can be received by the baptised. This concern was not unique to reformers like Bullinger, but can also be found in the work of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. For all the Reformers, it was the guiding principle of scripture and the presence of faith that gave the sacrament of baptism its spiritual substance and ensured the *res tantum*.[18] Indeed, in his *Lesser Catechism*, as well as connecting baptism with Christ's command in Matthew 28.19, and affirming his belief in the promises of God and the saving power of baptism to bring about forgiveness of sins, salvation from death and the devil, and eternal blessing to all who believe, Luther clearly stated that water alone could not bring about such things:

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[17] *The First Helvetic Confession,* article 20; in E.F.K. Muller (ed.), *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche* (Leipzig: Bohme, 1903), 106.25-43, cited by McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2007), 578.

[18] During the Middles Ages there had emerged three terms that came to be associated with the sacraments. The *sacramentum tantum*, which referred to the rite itself, the *sacramentum et res*, which referred to both the rite and the sacramental reality, and the *res tantum* or *res sacrementi*, which referred to the reality, in this instance, the invisible gift of grace, Thompson, *SCM Study Guide to the Sacraments,* 48.

> it is the Word of God with and through the water, and our faith which trusts in the Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God, that water is nothing but water, and there is no Baptism. But when it is linked with the Word of God, it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a bath of new birth in the Holy Spirit.[19]

It was not only Luther who believed that the Word of God and faith were vital elements of the sacraments. Calvin, who features prominently in the work of the Special Commission, shared that conviction and believed that "the sacraments [had] the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace."[20] Nevertheless, for Calvin, the "sacraments were more than a mere sign but less than a channel of grace."[21] Instead, he affirmed the view that baptism was a seal upon the promises of God and was intrinsically linked with the covenant of grace:

> Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word."[22]

Thus, whilst Calvin could accept that "one may call it [a sacrament] a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him,"[23] for him baptism also had ecclesiological implications – it was a sign setting apart those who belonged to the church – as well as being a seal of what God had already done in and through Christ. Moreover, whilst Luther had placed emphasis upon the importance and instrumental nature of faith, Calvin highlighted the activity of the Holy Spirit, suggesting that

> the sacraments properly fulfil their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in … I make such a division between Spirit and the sacraments that power to act rests with the former, and the ministry alone is left to the latter – a ministry empty and trifling, apart from the action of the Spirit, but charged with great effect when the Spirit works within and manifests power.[24]

Nevertheless, faith still played an important part in Calvin's sacramental theology, especially in light of the Reformers' stress upon justification by faith alone. Thus, within

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[19] Luther, *The Lesser Catechism* (1529); in D. *Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 30, part 1 (Weimar: Bohlaus, 1910), 255.20-257.24, cited by McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 569.
[20] Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, 14, 1-26 (1559), trans. Ford Lewis Battles, in LCC 21:1277-1303, cited by Johnson, *Sacraments and Worship: Key readings*, 18.
[21] Thompson, *SCM Study Guide to the Sacraments*, 55.
[22] *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXVII. Of the Sacraments, cited by Johnson, *Sacraments and Worship: Key readings*, 22.
[23] Calvin, *Institutes*, Chapter XIV, 1277.
[24] Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, 14, 1-26 (1559), trans. Ford Lewis Battles, in LCC 21:1277-1303, cited by Johnson, *Sacraments and Worship: Key readings*, 18.

Reformation thinking, "the instrumental cause of grace – that which opened the path for God's saving action – became faith,"[25] and the sacraments became the means whereby faith was sustained and strengthened. Calvin could thus conclude:

> It seems to me that a simple and proper definition would be to say that is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will towards us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men.[26]

The sustaining value of the sacrament in relation to faith and daily life is clearly then to the fore.

In Calvin's theology faith was connected to soteriology, and particularly with the promise found in Mark 16.16 that "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." Consequently, Calvin believed that salvation was the main purpose of baptism.[27] Against Zwingli, he argued that

> they who regard baptism as nothing but a token and mark by which we confess our religion before men, as soldiers bear the insignia of their commander as a mark of their profession, have not weighed what was the chief point.[28]

Thus, whilst Calvin believed that "baptism is also a symbol for bearing witness to our religion before men," its primary function was to point towards cleansing of sin and rebirth into newness of life.[29] Nevertheless, as well as highlighting his negative attitude towards women in ministry, his comments against "emergency" baptism reveal that Calvin did not think that baptism was necessary for salvation. Instead, upholding the ecclesiastical ministry and affirming the opinion that "few realize how much injury the dogma that baptism is necessary for salvation, badly expounded, has entailed," he suggested:

> Yet (you say) there is a danger lest he who is ill, if he die without baptism, be deprived of the grace of regeneration. Not at all. God declares that he adopts our babies as his own before they are born, when he promises that he will be our God and the God of our descendants after us [Gen. 17:7]. Their salvation is embraced in this word. No one will dare to be so insolent toward God as to deny that his promise of itself suffices for its effect.[30]

Calvin believed that the covenant was God's promise. Therefore, whether or not someone was baptised was ultimately irrelevant for salvation, for the elect were saved regardless.

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[25] Thompson, *SCM Study Guide to the Sacraments*, 53.
[26] Calvin, *Institutes*, Chapter XIV, 1277.
[27] Calvin, *Institutes*, IV (1559), trans. Ford Lewis Battles, in LCC 21:1303-4, 1323, 1325, cited by Johnson, *Sacraments and Worship: Key readings*, 160.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 161.
[30] Calvin, *Institutes*, Chapter XV, 20, 1320-1321.

Consequently, baptism, for Calvin, is logically a seal of what God has already promised, and has little effect on the issue of election. That is, whilst 'general election' can, through preaching and the activity of the Holy Spirit, lead to 'special election,' those who finally experience salvation are already predestined to do so.

Although disagreeing at times, Calvin's position on baptism was shared by earlier Reformers such as Zwingli. Zwingli's primary concern "was to assert and defend the absolute sovereignty of God"[31] over word and sacrament. From 1525 onwards, he affirmed that sacraments were signs of the covenant,[32] upholding the view that salvation comes through Christ alone and God's free election.[33] Nevertheless, as noted above, much of Calvin's polemic regarding his conviction that baptism is more than a mark or token of a confession of faith, was couched in response to Zwingli's earlier theology, in which he shunned any suggestion baptism might be causative. Instead, he believed that a sacrament was a 'pledge,' an act of dedication, or a memorial, and that it had no spiritual efficacy in and of itself:

> Christ left us two sacraments and no more, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. By these we are initiated, giving the name with the one, and showing by the other that we are mindful of Christ's victory and are members of his Church. In Baptism we receive a token that we are to fashion our lives according to the rule of Christ, by the Lord's Supper we give proof that we trust in the death of Christ, glad and thankful to be in that company which gives thanks to the Lord for the blessing of redemption which He freely gave us by dying for us.[34]

Zwingli "decrie[d] water as an effectual sign," but believed that it "marked the baptized as a member of a community," and was therefore "a public seal or mark of his or her inclusion in the community of faith."[35] To that end, it was a sign of and response to Christian belief, a rite that offered a "visual reminder of how God saves us through the death and resurrection of Jesus,"[36] and indicated that the baptized belonged to the church of Christ.[37] Whilst it would appear that Zwingli was not fond of birth imagery – as White suggests "possibly because it certainly implies that baptism effects a change and he shuns

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[31] Gregory J. Miller, "Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531)," in Carter Lindberg (ed), *The Reformed Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period* (U.S.A/UK/Australia: Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2002), 160.
[32] W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1992), 81.
[33] Miller, "Huldrych Zwingli," 160.
[34] Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion* (1525), trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, NC: Laybrinyth Press, 1981), 184, cited by Johnson, *Sacraments and Worship: Key readings*, 16-17.
[35] James F. White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1999), 37.
[36] Thompson, *SCM Study Guide to the Sacraments*, 98.
[37] Ibid., 55.

anything causative"[38] – it is evident that he believed that "in baptism, one was not simply initiated into a new beginning but inducted into a new way of life."[39] Consequently, he maintained that "the word 'sacrament' mean[t] a sign of commitment," and that "the man who receives the mark of baptism is the one who is resolved to hear what God says to him, to learn the divine precepts and to live his life in accordance with them."[40] Therefore, according to Martos, Zwingli believed that

> Faith was an inner experience that no outward sign could cause, and salvation was the direct work of the Holy Spirit who needed no instrumental rite. So sacraments could be no more than external representations of spiritual realities; they did not cause those realities, and they were not needed to become aware of them.[41]

For Zwingli, baptism had no effect on the inner workings of faith, and in and of itself was not causative of salvation.

In keeping with Calvin, who believed that the sacrament was a seal of a promise already given, Zwingli also believed that a sacrament was a sign, "not of a grace that is given, but of one that has been given (Z VI ii. 805.6–7)."[42] The sacrament can only seal a reality that God has already made possible and it is up to the baptized, as a corporate body, to decide how they are going to live that reality out. Thus, despite the distinction between Zwingli's theology and that of Calvin and Luther, Zwingli's emphasis upon a sacrament as a sign of dedication or commitment is not insignificant. Indeed, taken as whole, Reformation theology surrounding the sacraments raises fundamental questions regarding the relationship between baptism and grace, faith and its outworking, and ultimately leads to the question: what did the Scottish Reformers believe about the sacraments of baptism and how does this compare to the Special Commission?

Exploring the context of Scottish theology and ecclesiology, Wright suggests that the term sacrament is

> The common designation for certain rites or ceremonies of the Church which have both an outward and visible aspect (the sign) and the corresponding inward and spiritual reality (the thing signified).[43]

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[38] White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith*, 69.
[39] John Vissers, "Baptism in the Reformed Tradition," in Gordon L. Heath and James D. Dvorak (eds), *Baptism: Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Ontario: Pickwick Publications 2011), 81.
[40] Huldrych Zwingli, *On Baptism*; in *Corpus Reformatorum: Huldreich Zwinglis samtliche Werke*, vol. 91 (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1927), 217. 14-218.24, cited by McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 576.
[41] Martos, cited by Thompson, *SCM Study Guide to the Sacraments*, 55.
[42] W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought*, 83.
[43] Wright, 'Sacraments,' 738.

As is to be expected, this definition is very much in keeping with the Reformed thought explored above. Similarly, Wright's emphasis upon the *Scots Confession* and the *First Book of Discipline* as the documents which "set out the fundamentals of Reformed sacramental theology"[44] points towards the Scottish Reformers' beliefs and their strong affinity with the theology of other Reformers, particularly Calvin. The Scots Confession defines the sacraments, and then specifically baptism thus:

> so do we acknowledge and confess that we now in the time of the Evangel have two chief sacraments, only instituted by the Lord *Jesus* and commanded to be used of all they that will be reputed members of his body, to wit Baptism and the Supper or Table of the Lord *Jesus*, called Communion of his Body and his Blood. And these sacraments, as well of Old as of New Testament, now instituted of God, not only make any visible difference betwixt his people and they that were without his league: But also to exercise the faith of his children, and, by participation of the same sacraments, to seal in their hearts the assurance of his promise, and of that most blessed conjunction, union, and society, which the elect have with their head Christ *Jesus*. And thus we utterly damn the vanity of they that affirm sacraments to be nothing else but naked and bare signs. No we assuredlie believe that be Baptisme we ar ingrafted in Christ *Jesus*, to be made partakers of his justice, be quhilk our sinnes ar covered and remitted.[45]

Here, the emphasis upon institution by Christ defines the sacrament and gives warrant to sacramental practice, and subsequent discussion related to administration, scripture and faith are congruent with Reformation principles. However, Wright highlights that "neither the *Scots Confession* nor the *First Book of Discipline* deals precisely with the relation between the sign and the thing signified," and goes on to suggest that "the notion of a sacrament remains a problematic one for Reformed and Presbyterian theology."[46] In fact, he suggests that Scottish theologians have tended to have a lower view of baptism than of the Lord's Supper, and have not found it "congenial to confess that [in baptism] the sensible signs actually convey and confer what they signify – not of themselves, of course, but by the gift of Christ, who is the true minister of the sacraments, through the power of the Spirit."[47] I believe that this affirmation is accurate, and it suggests that either there is confusion regarding the nature and function of the sacrament of baptism, or, that even with the notion of Christ as the true minister, the Church of Scotland does not believe that baptism conveys or confers anything.

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[44] Ibid.
[45] *The Scots Confession of Faith*, Article XXI. Of the Sacraments, cited by Johnson, *Sacraments and Worship: Key readings* 19.
[46] Wright, 'Sacraments,' 739.
[47] Ibid.

Within the writings of the Special Commission on Baptism there is certainly evidence of continuity with the Reformed position regarding the sacraments, as well as confusion, and sometimes contrast, with later church documents. In the Commission's reports, the sacrament of baptism is discussed in relation to many themes, including: covenant, incarnation, soteriology, pistology, pneumatology and eschatology. However, the aspect that all these elements have in common, and which is discussed with greater frequency and depth than any other in relation to sacramental understanding, is grace. Highlighting the connection between Christ's birth and death, and often emphasising baptism's evangelical nature, the Special Commission considered baptism to be "a sacrament of the Gospel … a sacrament in which salvation is bestowed upon us from beyond us by pure grace."[48] Here the stress is not upon the individual's faith, repentance or experience of Christ, but on the agency and intention of God. Grace is intrinsically connected with justification, and is brought about in, through and by Christ himself.[49] This was a Reformation principle, which had, in the view of the Special Commission, often been forgotten or neglected. Indeed, the Commission suggested that there had been a "serious deterioration from the teaching of the New Testament regarding the conception of grace,"[50] and thus a falling away from what is recognised as a proper emphasis on Scripture.

In the Commission's view, this had come about primarily through a misleading connection between sacramental understanding and the transmission of grace, which was highlighted in chapter two. There they stated that "in no New Testament passages dealing with the sacraments are they spoken of as conveying 'grace'."[51] Throughout the reports the question of grace was frequently tied to criticism of other theological understandings of the sacrament, particularly those developed in the medieval period, which the Commission believed had resulted in the church being conceived as an Ark of Salvation, and in an ecclesiology that looked upon the church as a dispenser of grace.[52]

At the heart of the Commission's disapproval lay the belief that baptism was not a means of grace and did not 'work' *ex opere operato*, a conclusion shared by the Reformers. The Commission maintained that this error had originated within the Augustinian tradition and its notion of 'irresistible grace.'[53] This, they believed, had created "a contrast between the outward symbolic character of the sacraments and the inward mystical character of grace,

[48] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1955, 658.
[49] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1959, 660.
[50] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1956, 642.
[51] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1955, 654.
[52] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1956, 641.
[53] Ibid.

[which had] led to unfortunate results,"[54] namely (in their view), misconception and superstition. The Commission suggested that by viewing the sacrament as

> infused grace, [and] not the sign and seal of once and for all justification in Christ … on the Roman view, Baptism operates effectively only through the streams of grace in the whole series of sacraments, whereas for the Reformers, Baptism is effective for our justification because of the promise of Christ which it seals to us, and because of His saving presence with us through His Word and Spirit.[55]

Thus, as a consequence of "one of the great contributions of the Reformation" being "the reaffirmation that sacramental efficacy flows strictly from the divine initiative, and not from the minister's merit or from a quasi-magical *ex opere operato*,"[56] a stronger emphasis upon the person of Christ and the promises of God came to the fore. The members of the Commission criticised any sacramental understanding that carried with it any form of self justification[57] and maintained that a proper Biblical theology would ensure that grace could not be separated from the person of Christ.[58] Ecclesiologically, this removed the institutionalisation of the sacraments and ecclesiastical control of grace, and placed greater emphasis upon their origin and meaning. In a desire to reinforce the belief that the sacraments were not causative in and of themselves, there is also evidence that demonstrates that the Special Commission wanted to eradicate any association between the words sacrament and grace. From a minute of a meeting in January 1955 it is suggested by member D.F.S. Dick that:

> We should altogether ban speaking of the sacrament in terms of grace and rather speak of them always in terms of Christ's Persona and His Action. This is the Biblical understanding of Grace. In contrast to this, even the churches of the Reformation have often slipped back into medieval and false notions of grace as something that can be infused into us and dwell in.[59]

This idea was supported by Torrance, who, the minutes record, in a discussion related to Mr Heron's draft statement of doctrine produced by the Doctrinal Sub-Committee

> criticised the draft for making the doctrine of grace its starting point, and indicated a line along which he considered it ought to be possible to expand the doctrine without using such non-biblical phrases as "means of grace."[60]

Whilst the minutes observe that "others felt that it is essential that the doctrinal statement should make use of such traditional phrases which are deeply rooted in the mind of the

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[54] Ibid., 652.
[55] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May1957, 663.
[56] Nathan Mitchell, Nathan, "Sacrament," in Paul F. Bradshaw (ed), *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: SCM Press 2002), 414.
[57] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1956, 643.
[58] Ibid., 644.
[59] Minutes of the Special Commission on Baptism, 17th January 1955, 10.
[60] Minutes of the Special Commission on Baptism, 3rd December 1959, 2.

Church," it is clear that the Commission's members also believed that "every endeavour should be made to clear them of their association with false conceptions."[61] From both the minutes and the reports, it is apparent that much of this criticism was focussed on the medieval understanding of a sacrament, but the Commission also directed their criticism at the Church of Scotland's subordinate standards as contained within the documents of the Westminster Assembly. Discussing some of the "difficult features of the Subordinate Standards," the Special Commission list ten areas that they believe to be questionable, many of which are related, once again, to the question of grace. The conclusion that is reached by the Special Commission is that "the teaching of the Scots Confession of 1560 and the Reformation Catechisms is closer to the New Testament than that of the Westminster Standards."[62]

This seems surprising, not least because, given what has been said above regarding Reformed sacramental principles, there is little in the Westminster Confession of Faith that should cause the Special Commission much problem. Indeed, the Westminster Confession affirms that:

> Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his word.[63]

This was in keeping, not only with Calvin, but also the Scottish Reformers. Similarly, with regard to grace, it is suggested:

> The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution; which contains, together with a precept authorising the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.[64]

However, between these two statements lies the affirmation that

> There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.[65]

Likewise, when it comes to the Larger Westminster Catechism, it is suggested that

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1960, 680.
[63] *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1647, 40-41.
[64] *The Westminster Confession of Faith,* 1647, 41.
[65] Ibid.

> the parts of a sacrament are two; the one outward and sensible sign, used according to Christ's own appointment; the other an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified.[66]

It is, primarily, these statements upon which the Special Commission draws in order to outline what they view as the difficult features of the Subordinate Standards. These include: offering a "fixed notion of a 'sacrament'," "speaking of Baptism as a 'means of grace'," speaking of a "sacrament as an outward and sensible sign of an inward and spiritual grace," "the notion of Covenant has been changed to mean a contract," "failure to give union with Christ its central place," and teaching "a doctrine of limited atonement, so that the privileges of the Gospel were regarded not as part of the proclamation of the Gospel, but as the seal of the rights of the privileged only."[67] This highlighted the Special Commission's, and in particular, Torrance's disdain for dualism, by which they mean the relationship between the outward and inward, the sign and the signified, as well as Torrance's dislike of Federal theology, which he believed had contributed to "the separation of Baptism from immediate relation to Christ, and its interpretation as a sacrament of entry into the visible society of the Church only."[68] It entrenched their views regarding the importance of scripture and the significance they placed on baptism's evangelical content and quality. Perhaps most pertinently of all, it emphasised their annoyance with any sense that grace can be brought "into the pragmatic realm of means and ends," leading to the assertion that "the New Testament … never relates Baptism to grace, and never thinks of grace or Baptism in terms of 'means'."[69] Indeed, at the end of the 1960 report, the Special Commission state that

> It is to be admitted that when considered as a "means," Baptism has no spiritual efficacy in itself. It must not be regarded as infusing "grace." Baptism is a sacrament of the Gospel.

It is then later affirmed, under a section dealing with why baptism is called a sacrament or means of grace, that

> In Baptism Jesus Christ comes to us under the sign of water, appointed by Him to represent His cleansing and quickening power in a way that we can easily understand, so that we may be assured that He really does what the sign represents.[70]

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[66] Ibid., 100.
[67] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1960, 680-81.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 680.
[70] Ibid., 691.

From this it is evident that when it comes to the sacrament of baptism, the Special Commission had much in common with the Reformers. However, there was a subtle difference in their conception of grace, which is evident when the *Manual of Church Doctrine* is explored.

A Manual of Church Doctrine according to the Church of Scotland was first published in 1920 by H.J. Wotherspoon and J.M. Kirkpatrick. It recognised that the Church of Scotland standards stemmed from the Westminster Confession and, in the original preface, stated their desire

> to show that within the documents by which that Church defines her position there is justification for an explicit adherence to the principles of the Church Historic not only with regard to doctrine, which will hardly be doubted, but also with regard to the nature of the Church itself, to Ordinances generally, and with regard in particular to Sacrament and Ministry.[71]

Whilst affirming that the standards produced by the Westminster Assembly still left room for interpretation,[72] and did not "represent the full Presbyterian position at the golden period of Presbyterianism,"[73] they nevertheless maintained that

> the principles of interpretation which they used lead to a result which corresponds with the actual intention of the Standards, as that existed in the mind of the Scottish representatives in the Assembly, and present the view which commended the Westminster Standards to the Church of Scotland, and made their adoption by the General Assembly possible.[74]

To that end, the Manual was intended to offer a contemporary view, which "lineally" represented the views of the original Standards.[75] The 1920 Manual went out of print and in 1960 a new edition, revised by T.F. Torrance and Ronald Selby Wright was published. They believed that the time was right "for a renewed interpretation of the doctrine of the Catholic Church Reformed which is established in Scotland," and were grateful to the Wotherspoon Trustees for giving them permission to revise the Manual "in the light of more recent scholarship and in places to expand it."[76] In the 1960 edition baptism is discussed in some detail and it becomes clear that substantial changes were made.

Indeed, in his thesis, John Scott includes a very enlightening appendix, highlighting the additions, deletions and rewordings introduced by Torrance. In chapter two, related to the

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[71] H.J. Wotherspoon and J.M. Kirkpatrick, *A Manual of Church Doctrine according to the Church of Scotland* (London: Oxford University Press 1965), ix.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., vii.

sacraments, Scott reckons that there was a 32.4% increase in words added by Torrance, which makes for interesting reading when baptism is considered. By definition, baptism is deemed to have been ordered by Christ, and to that end, it is subsequently described as a sacrament. As a consequence, the Manual affirms that

> Christ makes good His own institution, and gives effect to His own ordinance. He stands behind the ordinance, and His action follows its action. He makes it efficacious for the end for which He appointed it.[77]

The position presented by the Manual is very much in keeping with the thinking of the Special Commission, who maintained that Jesus really does what the sign represents.

Indeed, the Manual suggests that Christ is the true minister of the sacrament,[78] and baptism is "the sacrament of what God has already done in Christ,"[79] and a whole section is devoted to the relationship between the sacraments and the incarnation. Once again, the soteriological aspect is emphasised, but here a holistic approach is advocated:

> the sacraments result from the fact that Salvation operates by Incarnation; and they import that our relation to Christ is a living relation embracing our whole nature, bodily as well as spiritual."[80]

Not only does this uphold the Special Commission's disdain for dualism, but it also suggests that in and through the sacraments,

> Christ assumes a sensible vehicle and, in association with sign and element for our recognition and appreciation, grants us to share in the mystery of the incarnate life and death and resurrection.[81]

With regard to the manner in which the sacrament representatively assures the baptised of what Christ actually does, this is in keeping with the sentiment expressed in the Special Commission's 1960 report mentioned above,[82] but it is here that ambiguity begins to emerge. Not least because this is one of the places where it is evident Torrance has added words to the original Manual. The original text suggested that "grace assumes a sensible vehicle and is associate with sign and element for our recognition and appropriation."[83] Instead of grace, Torrance had changed the emphasis to Christ and made his incarnate life, death and resurrection pivotal. This is a subtle change, but nevertheless important to note.

[77] Ibid., 11.
[78] Ibid., 19.
[79] Ibid., 23.
[80] Ibid., 15.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1960, 691.
[83] John Scott, Appendix Two: Revision of Wotherspoon and Kirkpatrick, in 'Recovering the Meaning of Baptism in Westminster Calvinism in Critical Dialogue with Thomas F. Torrance,' 262.

When it comes to the question of what, if anything, the sacraments impart, Wotherspoon and Kirkpatrick uphold the view that a sacrament operates outwardly in three ways: signifying, sealing and applying its spiritual part or content.[84] To that end, they suggest that "a sacrament exists where sign and grace are brought together into one operation and constitute a single action; so that where the sign is, there is the grace."[85] Consequently, and unlike the Special Commission, they find no problem in affirming that baptism "actually conveys and confers its spiritual part;" indeed, they are able to conclude:

> [baptism] is the efficient instrument of a Divine operation and a medium of grace which cannot be separated from the Divine Giver. It effects that which it symbolizes because what it signifies, Christ does.[86]

In many ways this is very similar to what the Special Commission believed, for the Manual maintains that the grace is not caused by the effect of the water or words surrounding baptism, but is efficacious, because it points towards the grace already conveyed in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. However, this emphasis is was a result of Torrance's addition.

The remainder of the Manual dealing with baptism has much in common with the Reformed tradition and the Special Commission. For the authors of the Manual, baptism is a direct consequence of the activity of the Holy Spirit, who "conveys to us 'Christ and His benefits,' making the Sacraments 'effectual'."[87] For them, this is a gift that endures,

> and its possession is a constant reason, on the one hand, for penitence in that we fall short of or walk contrary to it; on the other hand, it is a ground of confidence; it is a background of faith, and an ever-present motive of conduct.[88]

This is an interesting point, for it draws together faith and action, and points towards an ethical outworking of baptism. The Manual, like the Special Commission, is explicit in highlighting that the recipient of baptism is always passive, doing nothing, "but only surrenders himself to a Divine operation," but at the same time acknowledges that conduct is important, and in particular that "confession of faith, renunciation of hindrance, and promise of fidelity" are "requirements of Baptism – factors in its proper use."[89] Thus, the efficacy of baptism is suggested in the affirmation that "on the Divine side all is real and complete in Christ. God does for us whatever is needful for our being put into a state of

[84] Wotherspoon and Kirkpatrick, *A Manual of Church Doctrine*, 17.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., 18-19.
[87] Ibid., 19-20.
[88] Ibid., 22.
[89] Ibid.

grace."[90] This is emphasised later in the Manual, when attention is drawn to the confidence that the baptized can and should have:

> God is first; all is of grace; and of this grace Baptism is the Sacrament, 'signifying, sealing, and applying' it. It marks for the individual God's purpose for him. 'Christ died for the world' – but now: Christ died for this man. 'God has chosen some' – but now: God has chosen YOU. And He translates you into the Kingdom of His dear Son. This change of status and sphere is compared to a new birth: and the act of God in according it is compared to an act of spiritual generation. Grace is never mechanical, never compulsory – but without Divine Grace we can do nothing."[91]

Therefore, whilst it could be said that through baptism God initiates an individual into the sphere of grace (the word sphere was Torrance's revision),[92] there is a sense in which a response to God's grace, in the shape of faith, is required for the benefits of baptism to be fully realised. This may or not be forthcoming from the recipient of baptism. As such, the Manual can affirm that

> Baptism is a complete Sacrament: on God's side it ensures to the baptized 'all things that pertain to life and godliness.' But it calls for our response – 'a covenant is not of one'; on our side we must own and embrace its gift and obligation.[93]

A suitable response to God's grace would be "to repent, to believe, to turn to God with all our heart, to hold to Christ and to grow up into Him." However, the authors of the Manual recognise the reality that "Baptism does not ensure our doing of any of these things. It only calls for them and makes them possible."[94] They argue that there must be a sequel to baptism, particularly in the case of individuals baptised as infants.

Whilst the Manual of Church Doctrine can assert that baptism is a complete sacrament, it also affirms that full communion as part of the life of the church can only be realised after "having been instructed in religion and having reached years of responsibility."[95] In the case of those baptised in infancy, there comes a moment whereby the baptised moves from 'pupilage' to become an heir who "may demand to receive his inheritance."[96] This requires that "they must profess their Baptism, own its obligations, and claim its privileges; and their claim must be admitted and they be confirmed in it by the Church."[97] This is a pointer towards confirmation and an indication of the importance placed upon that liturgical rite as a means of admittance to the Lord's Supper:

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[90] Ibid..
[91] Ibid., 24.
[92] John Scott, Appendix Two: Revision of Wotherspoon and Kirkpatrick, in 'Recovering the Meaning of Baptism in Westminster Calvinism in Critical Dialogue with Thomas F. Torrance,' 280.
[93] Wotherspoon and Kirkpatrick, *A Manual of Church Doctrine*, 29.
[94] Ibid., 23.
[95] Ibid., 28.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.

> [the Candidate] knows what Baptism involves, and the vows of it: he believes what the Church believes; and he consents to be separate from what Christ forbids, and to bear his part in the Church's labours and sorrows and sacrifices; and he asks his place in its active ranks. The Church must enquire of him – that he is indeed baptized, and that in faith and life and purpose he is faithful, and, being satisfied of these things must own him and his right, and must serve him heir, and open to him the way into the Holiest.[98]

All of this presupposes a period of preparation and learning, which the Manual suggests should be initiated and encouraged by "Parents, Sponsors, Teachers, the Ministry," as the baptised move towards their vocation. This was an idea shared by the Commission who highlighted the importance of catechetical instruction in both the Early Church and the Scottish Reformers. For the Manual's authors, the importance of this cannot be overstated, as this step speaks of personal decision:

> It is the opportunity consciously and personally to embrace the Service of Christ and to commit oneself to His keeping; the occasion upon which conversion may become definite, and faith become aware of itself, and an eternal bond of love to Christ be finally established.[99]

It is only after "a final examination of their intention, purpose and readiness," that the moment arrives "before God and the Church," in which the candidate can renew "the vows once made on their behalf," thus leading to prayer and hands laid upon them in blessing, resulting in them knowing "themselves received to the place which Christ has prepared for them."[100] Looking back towards baptism, the Manual suggests, should lead to the desire to perfect baptism by confessing faith in Jesus Christ before God and the Church, allowing the latter to recognise and confirm the place which baptism confers upon the candidate.[101] Only then, when the "Baptismal status is thus acknowledged [is] the way is open to the Holy Table, and to all Christian privilege." From this it is apparent that even as the Church of Scotland affirms the completeness of the sacrament of baptism, it suggests that the completeness is only fulfilled on the part and side of God. For the baptised individual there are further steps to be taken before the same can be said of them. These are bound up with confession of faith and the demonstration of right conduct or behaviour, all of which requires preparation and on-going learning and growth.

Taking all these factors and comments together, it would appear that the Special Commission held quite firmly to a Reformed understanding of baptism, but differed when

[98] Ibid., 29.
[99] Ibid., 30.
[100] Ibid., 30-31.
[101] Ibid., 30.

it came to the conception of sacramental grace. Part of this might be a consequence of Wright's suggestion that generally speaking the Scottish context did not have a fixed notion of what baptism could or could not infer. Yet, when considering the work of the Special Commission, their emphasis upon the complete nature of baptism, their disdain for Augustine's definition of baptism, as well as the desire to retain the objectivity of the sacrament, so as to ensure that an individual's response could not be considered to be part of the sacraments efficacy, suggests that confusion was not the problem. This becomes increasingly apparent when the Covenant of grace is examined.

Although the Special Commission appear to have been against the notion of the sacrament of baptism conveying or conferring grace in and of itself, when it came to the Covenant of grace, they appear to have been more convinced. Whilst arguments in defence of infant baptism are throughout the pages of the Special Commission's reports, the place of children in Christian baptism is discussed in the 1958 Report, 'The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism,' and it is here that the main arguments are summarised. The arguments in chapter one pertain to the Jewish practice of circumcision and Proselyte washing, the Baptism of whole households[102] and the practice of the early Church,[103] as well as children in the New Covenant,[104] the Gospels[105] and the Epistles.[106] This discussion intertwines importance of ritual continuity, the necessity of familial connections, and the reality of initiation into the covenant community to offer a case for infant baptism, which is established by building upon the historical considerations, the sayings of Christ about children, and what the Commission takes to be the warrant for infant baptism.[107] Thus, whilst it is believed by many in the Church of Scotland that circumcision in the Old Testament is replaced by baptism in the New Testament, the initiatory sign of the covenant is nevertheless continued, as children of parents who are already within the covenantal family receive the mark of belonging. Similarly, the importance of family connections is exemplified by the example of whole households being baptised, and the presumption that infants within that

[102] Acts 16:15, 33 and 1 Cor.1:16 are cited as evidence of the baptism of whole households based upon the Oikos formula, in keeping with the Old Testament usage of speaking of households as including children, Gen. 17:12, Ex.12:16-27, 1 Sam. 1:21, and John 4:53.
[103] Reference is made in the Reports to the positive mention of infant baptism in the works of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Origen, as well as the criticisms of Tertullian and the attacks of the Paulicians.
[104] A parallel is suggested between Acts 2.38-39 and Deut. 29:10-16, relating to the promises of the covenant and "little ones."
[105] Mark 10:14, Mark 10:15, and Mark 9:37 (and their comparable citations in the synoptic gospels), are the basis of discussion related to baptism, blessing, children and the Kingdom of God.
[106] Focus is placed upon the words 'children' and 'little ones' and reference is made to 1 John, Ephesians 4:21, Col. 3:18 and 1 Cor. 7:14 in relation to the discussion of 'holiness' and baptism.
[107] Church of Scotland, *The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism: A Study Document issued by The Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: St Andrew's Press 1958), 47.

household would have been baptised. At the same time, the Commission believed that the demands of the covenant, which belong to the whole people of God, require that only those infants who are born to parents already within the family can be baptised and sealed. On the basis of these arguments, it is hardly surprising that the Act anent the Sacraments contains the conditions that it does. Yet, do these justifying arguments carry equal weight?

I ask this, because it would seem that at times the Special Commission were persuaded by some arguments more than others, particularly in relation to the baptism of whole households and the blessing of children by Jesus. Appealing to scriptural verses that address Jesus' attitude towards 'little children,' the Special Commission concludes that having stated that "the Kingdom of God belongs to little children," Jesus "could not have refused to allow them to share in the sacrament of initiation into that Kingdom, which is Baptism;"[108] particularly when it is children that "even adult candidates for Baptism need to resemble in order to enter."[109] Therefore, the Commission can assert that

> *Our Lord, who bids His disciples receive little children in His name, cannot refuse to receive them Himself in the sacrament of Baptism."*[110]

On this basis, it could be inferred that in the light of Jesus' words and actions, all children are to be welcomed and received, and, as receivers of the Kingdom, are to be baptised; irrespective of ethnic and cultural considerations. This stands in stark contrast to the covenantal framework, which has clear stipulations regarding who can be part of the community. In this latter model, the promises of God belong to believers and their children, and are offered to those outside the covenant on the condition of repentance and faith. The Commission tried to hold together these inconsistent positions by asserting that "it is within the context of the church and of the Christian home that the blessing of the children [was] recorded."[111] Believing that the children blessed were those born within the holy people of God, it followed that their holiness was derived from their baptism, which was their right, based upon the promises of God.[112] It is in this sense that the 1955 report affirms that "the reception of little children is an action that takes place within the Church of Christ and therefore could not be other than Baptism."[113] At the same time, the Commission also maintains that "apart from repentance and faith Christian baptism is

[108] Ibid., 49.
[109] Ibid., 50.
[110] Ibid., 51.
[111] Ibid., 49.
[112] Ibid., 54.
[113] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, 1955, 631-32.

unthinkable."[114] When the Reports of the Special Commission and the Biblical Doctrine are considered as a whole, it is therefore, evident that the suppositions and assumptions made by the Commission at one stage of their deliberations, often from arguments of silence, are sometimes contradicted and betrayed by the Commission's own later words. This was not helped by the Commission asserting, in several places in the reports, that it was Christ's incarnation that provided a defence for infant baptism. This raises many questions, not least when the justification for infant baptism is being sought. Thus, first and foremost, what is the Reformed tradition's covenant framework for the justification of infant baptism?

Whilst William Klempa has pointed out that "prior to the sixteenth century the idea of covenant did not figure prominently in theological works,"[115] most of the theological dictionaries agree that covenant "is arguably the most important biblical term characterizing God's relationship with Israel and God's relationship, through Jesus Christ, with Jews and Gentiles alike."[116] The Special Commission certainly believed it to be important, affirming that the "biblical examples of promise, circumcision, and seal within the covenantal Fatherhood of God, found especially in the Old Testament"[117] were important features in the justification of baptism. This is predominantly based upon the covenant that God made with Abraham,[118] which was sealed by circumcision, and, although a binding agreement, was thought to be unconditional and unilateral.[119] However, as the Reports of the Commission dealing with the sixteenth and seventeenth century demonstrate, defining covenant theology is often a complicated and confusing matter. Klempa has suggested "few words are as important in the Scriptures as the word *covenant,* and few words are as complex and difficult to understand."[120] Part of the difficulty arises from the number of covenants that are found within scripture, which subsequently take different forms, leading to debate regarding meaning.[121] Much of this rests on the definition of covenant. Whilst the original word for covenant in the Old Testament is

[114] Ibid., 657.
[115] William Klempa, "The Concept of Covenant in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Continental and British Reformed Theology," in Donald K. McKim (ed), *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers 1998), 9.
[116] James W. Skillen, "Covenant," in Ian A. McFarland (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011), 119.
[117] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, 1957, 684.
[118] Abrahamic Covenant references: Gen.12:1-9, 15:1-21, 17:1-27.
[119] Irene Nowell, "Covenant," in Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (eds.), *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan 1987), 244.
[120] Klempa, "The Concept of the Covenant in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Continental and British Reformed Theology," 95.
[121] Examples of other Covenants include the Sinaitic Covenant, the Noahic Covenant, and the Davidic Covenant.

berith, David Weir highlights that as this word was translated into other languages in the sixteenth century, most noticeably Greek and Latin, the original meaning of the word was lost:

> In the Septuagint *berith* was translated by the word *diatheke,* which has slightly different connotations from the Hebrew word … With the translation of the scriptures into Latin these two words had three possible Latin translations: *foedus, pactum,* and *testamentum.*[122]

Weir's exploration of the lexical and biblical evidence of the sixteenth century reveals that *foedus* or *pactum* were the preferred translations of covenant in Latin, with *testamentum* dropping out of use.[123] This is not insignificant when the Greek translation of the word is examined. Weir points out "whereas *berith* implies the notion of 'imposition', 'liability', or 'obligation', *diatheke* technically refers to a last will and testament."[124] As such, *diatheke* and *testamentum* would have had a natural affinity.[125] However, as the sixteenth century unfolded and Federal theology[126] emerged, "the idea of a conditional covenant became more important."[127] Weir highlights that whilst the Greek word, *suntheke,* which is a legal agreement that places conditional obligations upon equal partners, was rarely used as a translation of covenant in the Septuagint,[128] he suggests that Federal theology arose because of the conflict between *suntheke* and *diatheke,* on the basis that "it was an attempt to explain why God seemed to show two faces: one of predestinating grace through his sovereign decrees and another of conditional love."[129] This tension resulted in the development of Federal theology, most noticeably in the work of Gabriel Biel,[130] and in 1562, in the work of Zacharius Ursinus who

> spoke of a pre-fall covenant of law between God and Adam in the garden that demanded perfect obedience with the promise of life and threatened disobedience with the penalty of death.[131]

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[122] David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989), 51.
[123] Ibid., 58.
[124] Ibid., 56.
[125] Ibid., 57.
[126] Federal theology can be seen in the work of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), John Calvin (1509-1564), Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587) and Zacharius Ursinus (1534-1583).
[127] Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought*, 55.
[128] Ibid., 56.
[129] Ibid., 57.
[130] P.A.L, "Covenant," in Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J.I. Packer (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press 1988), 175.
[131] Ibid.

This created the possibility of a prelapsarian covenant between God and Adam, which was conditional. In time, this idea was developed further by Caspar Olevianus, who in 1585 "presented the idea of a pre-temporal covenant between God the Father and God the Son for the salvation of man."[132] Thus, instead of there being only one covenant, there was, in reality, three: a covenant of works (made between God and Adam), a covenant of redemption (made between God the Father and God the Son), and a covenant of grace. Thus, federal theology can be described as

> a specific type of covenant theology, in that the covenant holds together every detail of the theological system, and is characterized by a prelapsarian and postlapsarian covenant schema centred around the first Adam and the second Adam, who is Jesus Christ."[133]

Whilst Weir suggests that prelapsarian tendencies are present in the work of St Augustine (354-430) and Ambrosious Catherinus (1487-1553),[134] it would seem that it was the Reformation, and "the discussions related to predestination"[135] and original sin,[136] which were the driving factors in the development of federal theology.

From the perspective of baptismal theology the Commission appeared to suggest that this presented a number of problems. It caused confusion as to which covenant an individual is being baptised into. It creates questions as to whether a covenant prescribes conditions and obligations upon the human partners involved, and, if so, what they are. Finally, it creates a tension between the sanctifying nature of grace and the self-justification of good works. Nevertheless, despite these variations, many within the Reformed tradition would deem it important to remember that "whatever the stress on obligation, the initiative in establishing the basic covenant relationship lies with God."[137] Similarly, Robert Davidson is correct to point out that covenant theology "has not always succeeded in holding together the prevenient grace of God and the responsive obedience of the people of God which characterizes many of the Old Testament covenant traditions."[138] Thus, whether the covenant is unilateral or bilateral, "God commands his people to keep the covenant through love and obedience," because from the start of the bible to the end, scripture points

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[132] Ibid.
[133] Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought*, 3.
[134] Ibid., 12.
[135] Ibid., 57.
[136] Ibid., 22.
[137] Robert Davidson, "Covenant," in Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000), 142-143.
[138] Ibid., 143.

to the belief that the "essence of God's covenant is captured in the summary promise, 'I will be your God, and you shall be my people'."[139]

For John Calvin, and many of his Reformation followers, "renewed interest in the older testament and mastery of Hebrew came to the fore, leading to increased attention to the importance of covenant as a central theological (and more specifically) ecclesiological concept."[140] Yet, whilst it is upheld that "it is the argument from covenant theology which forms the basis of Calvin's position,"[141] variant views exist as to what Calvin's understanding of the covenant actually was. For instance, some believe that "Calvin is in many ways the forerunner of Reformed Federal theology,"[142] whilst others maintain that he "brought an emphasis upon a single covenant of grace to Reformed theology."[143] Richard Muller, writing in *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, highlights the complexities of Calvin's covenant theology, pointing out that the *Institutes* does not offer the full scope of Calvin's research on the topic:

> The *Institutes* does not … reflect either the extended discussion of the covenant with Abraham in the commentary on Genesis 17, the highly significant bilateral covenant language of the Deuteronomy sermons, or the careful definition of the Psalms commentary in which Calvin notes how far from one perspective the covenant is unconditional and from another, conditional.[144]

Nevertheless, David Wright suggests that "in the experience of the Church of Scotland the turn taken in respect of baptism … was to a major emphasis of Calvin's *Institutes*."[145] Therefore, for the purpose of this chapter, Calvin's understanding of covenant theology, in relation to infant baptism, as found in the *Institutes* and as outlined in the Special Commission's 1957 report, will suffice.

In the opening section of Chapter XVI, Book IV of Calvin's *Institutes*, it is clear that Calvin is an advocate and defender of infant baptism. Indeed, he comments that he "cannot

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[139] Gen. 17:7, Ex. 6:7, 2 Cor. 6:16-18, Rev. 21:2-3, P.A.L, "Covenant," in Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J.I. Packer (eds.), *New Dictionary of* Theology, 173.

[140] James W. Skillen, "Covenant," in Ian A. McFarland (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian* Theology, 119.

[141] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century* (Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing 1992), 141.

[142] P.A.L, "Covenant," in Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J.I. Packer (eds.), *New Dictionary of* Theology, 175.

[143] Carl R.Trueman, "Federal Theology," in Ian A. McFarland (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian* Theology, 183.

[144] Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 2000), 155.

[145] David F. Wright, *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective: Collected Studies* (Great Britain: Paternoster 2007), 237.

refrain from adding an appendix … to restrain [the] mad ravings" of those "frantic spirits" who "have grievously disturbed the church over infant baptism."[146] This statement, and indeed the appendix, was added in response to the Anabaptists, who had repudiated infant baptism in favour of believers' baptism and advocated what the Catholics and magisterial Reformers saw as rebaptism. Calvin sets out to outline the scriptural warrant, origin and meaning of baptism, in order to justify the practice of baptising infants both biblically and theologically and free it and other practices from superstition. He maintained that "if it appears to have been contrived by the mere rashness of men, let us bid it farewell and measure the true observance of baptism by God's will alone."[147] This sentiment highlights the importance of scripture as the driving force in Calvin's theology, no more so than when it came to the covenant and the meaning of baptism. Calvin suggested that

> Scripture declares that baptism first points to the cleansing of our sins, which we obtain from Christ's blood; then to the mortification of our flesh, which rests upon participation in his death and through which believers are reborn into newness of life and into the fellowship of Christ …[and] is also a symbol for bearing witness to our religion before men.[148]

The link between soteriology and baptism is emphasised in this definition: baptism is considered to offer cleansing and renewal from sins. Calvin believed that

> Even infants bear the condemnation with them from their mother's womb; for, though they have not yet brought forth the fruits of their own iniquity, they have the seed enclosed within themselves. Indeed, their whole nature is a seed of sin; thus it cannot be but hateful and abominable to God. Through baptism, believers are assured that this condemnation has been removed and withdrawn from them.[149]

As well as the promise of forgiveness, made possible through the death of Christ, the importance of fellowship and participation in the life of Christ and its purpose(s) are also highlighted. Calvin believed that

> Baptism [was] the sign of the initiation by which we are received into the society of the church, in order that, engrafted in Christ, we may be reckoned among God's children.[150]

As children of God, "the Church is for Calvin the sphere of the Fatherhood of God," and through adoption, baptism is deemed to be "entrance into the family of God."[151] As

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[146] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 2,* edited by John T. McNeill (Louisville/London: Westminister John Knox Press 2006), Book IV, 1324.
[147] Ibid., 1325.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid., 1311.
[150] Ibid., 1303.
[151] Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press 1995), 180.

members of that family, the church is a community that is engrafted into Christ, as each is "uprooted and separated from every corrupt source of life," and welcomed "into a new sphere of common life which the members of Christ share with their exalted Head."[152] As such, "Calvin can speak of admission into the Church and ingrafting into the body of Christ as the same thing."[153] Ecclesiologically, this means that Calvin "regard[ed] the activity of the Church towards its individual members as being identical with the action of Christ towards the individual."[154] Therefore, the church is an instrument, a tool, used by God "to make community with Christ possible and real,"[155] and its calling is to "invite people to the gospel and to the community of Christ and to preserve them in that community."[156] Calvin believed that the church was a corporate unity, a pilgrim people, a covenant community, who, in the power of the Spirit, working through faith and perseverance, were "the history of the restoration of order."[157] Thus, whilst Calvin believed that the impetus of the covenant arose from God's mercy, and maintained that God would remain faithful to his promises, regardless of God's people being, at times, wayward covenant breakers, there was an obligation placed upon God's people to be faithful. For the "end and aim of the covenant" was the creation of a "harmonious community."[158]

This is significant, for despite the discussions pertaining to whether Calvin believed in a bilateral or unilateral covenant, it is evident that when it came to baptism, he believed in only one covenant: the covenant of grace, which placed the obligation of obedience upon the recipient of God's mercy and grace. Thus, whilst Calvin affirmed that there were differences between the old and the new covenants, he maintained that the promise and substance of each remained the same. As a consequence of Christ, baptism

> is extended to us not on the ground that God has fulfilled His part of the Covenant and that now we have to fulfil our part, but because the Covenant has already been fulfilled completely on our behalf in Christ.[159]

Therefore, what was promised in the Old Testament has been fulfilled in the new, and only through the lens of eschatology will that truth be fully realised. Indeed, John Riggs highlights that during the 1550s, "Calvin re-emphasized the unity of the two covenants and

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[152] Ibid., 175.
[153] Ibid., 155.
[154] Ibid., 235.
[155] Georg Plasger, "Ecclesiology," in Herman J. Selderhuis (ed), *The Calvin Handbook* (Michigan/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2009), 323.
[156] Ibid., 331.
[157] Benjamin Charles Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill 1970), 65.
[158] Ibid., 49.
[159] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, 1957, 678.

their foundation in Christ."[160] The Special Commission was therefore right to state "the content and substance of the sacrament of circumcision, was … the same as the content and substance of the sacrament of Baptism."[161] Calvin suggests in the *Institutes* that "The promise … is the same in both, namely, that of God's fatherly favour, of forgiveness of sins, and of eternal life."[162]

However, whilst believing that God's goodness was available to all people, and criticising the injurious dogma that upheld that baptism was necessary for salvation,[163] Calvin maintained that salvation was only available within the church. Thus, these three elements of God's covenantal promise listed above apply only to those who belong within the covenant community. For Calvin, this began in Genesis 17, in the Abrahamic covenant, which had circumcision as the sign and seal of initiation into the people, the family, of God. Up until that moment, Calvin believes that

> the condition of the whole world was one and the same. But as soon as it was said, 'I will be a God to you, and to your seed after you,' the church was separated from other nations … Then the people of Israel was received, as the flock of God, into their own fold.[164]

From this it is clear that Calvin understood the covenant to offer special privileges to the people of God, and, in light of the continuity of covenants, considers there to be a correlation between Israel and the church. Indeed, Milner highlights that Calvin believed that "the church first sees the light of day in the election and calling of Abraham, and receives the covenant as its birthright."[165] As such, Calvin can suggest that just as

> Circumcision was for the Jews their first entry into the church, because it was a token to them by which they were assured of adoption as the people and household of God … In like manner, we are also consecrated to God through baptism, to be reckoned his people.[166]

On the basis that circumcision was synonymous with baptism because the covenant remained "firm and steadfast," and the promises were inwardly spiritual, not carnal,[167] Calvin believed that it applied "no less today to the children of Christians than under the

[160] John W. Riggs, *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: An Historical and Practical Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press 2010), 65.
[161] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1957, 677.
[162] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV*, 1327.
[163] Ibid., 1321.
[164] Comm. Gen. 17.7, CO XXIII, 237 in Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 47.
[165] Ibid., 52.
[166] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV*, 1327.
[167] Ibid., 1333.

Old Testament it pertained to the infants of Jews."[168] For "immediately after making the covenant with Abraham," God "commanded it to be sealed in infants by an outward sacrament." Therefore, Calvin asks, "what excuse will Christians give for not testifying and sealing it in their children today?"[169] The premise of this question was not only that the promise and the substance of the sacrament was the same, but given that the covenant was a birth right, it was considered that baptism was "properly administered to infants as something owed to them."[170] Unlike "he who is an unbeliever, sprung from impious parents," and "reckoned as alien to the fellowship of the covenant until he is joined to God through faith,[171] it was considered to be a right for "those infants who derive their origin from Christians," because "they have been born directly into the inheritance of the covenant, and are expected by God … to be received into baptism."[172] This emphasised the notion that the children of the Jews, as heirs of the covenant, were distinguished from other children by being called a holy seed,[173] and as such, so too, were the children of Christians. Those who were born to parents who were already believers were automatically part of the covenant community because Calvin believed that " without doubt he [God] counts as his children the children of those whose seed he promised to be a father."[174] On this basis, Calvin was able to suggest that paedobaptism was permissible, not only because he believed that the early regeneration of Christian children was a possibility,[175] nor because Jesus blessed little children, who therefore should not be excluded "from the sign, and the benefit, of baptism,"[176] but because "infants are baptized into future repentance and faith, and even though these have not yet been formed in them, the seed of both lies hidden within them by the secret work of the Spirit."[177]

It is at this point that the relationship between election and adoption, and the issue of grace and faith become increasingly important, and somewhat ambiguous. Benjamin Milner points out that for Calvin there was both a 'general election' and a 'particular election.' The 'general election' was equated with the covenant, and was indicative of the separation

[168] Ibid., 1328.
[169] Ibid., 1329.
[170] Ibid., 1328.
[171] Ibid., 1347.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid., 1328.
[174] Ibid., 1347.
[175] Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, 195.
[176] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV*, 1329.
[177] Ibid., 1343.

God made between "the 'other nations'," and the "peculiar people" called the church.[178] This is referred to by Calvin as

> 'the general election of the people (*generalis populi election*),' the 'common adoption (*communis adoption*),' and as the 'adoption (*totum populum adoption*)' or 'election (*totius gentis electione*)' of the 'whole nation.'[179]

Here the words election and adoption are used interchangeably to denote the same thing, and yet it is clear that they had slightly different connotations for Calvin. The 'general election' referred to all those who were part of the visible church, and who had responded to the *ordinatio Dei*, which offered to "the whole people … the promise of salvation."[180] The 'particular election,' whilst still part of the *ordinatio Dei*, pertained to that "hidden and secret" election, determined by God, and "unknowable in itself."[181] As such, it was related to the invisible church, and was distinguished from the 'general election' in three ways:

> First, it has to do with individuals, rather than groups or nations; second, it is not only offered, but assigned; and third, it carries with it a certainty which does not admit of any doubt.[182]

Thus, the general election in some instances can lead to a special election, because 'through the outward call (preaching)," the "secret call (election) is revealed to and appropriated by the individual (calling)."[183] This is all dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit, "which distinguishes the elect within the 'seed' of Abraham," and gives strength to the elect to persevere in faith.[184] On this basis, Milner highlights that "it is possible for an individual to live within the scope of the covenant, and yet not be among the elect."[185]

With this in mind, the defence of the baptism of infants on the grounds that they are baptized into future repentance and faith creates some problems, particularly when it comes to the use of the metaphor of the seed. Ronald Wallace suggests that "it is the *Baptism* that is the seed," and that "future potentially lies … not in the heart of the baptised person," but rather, "in the fact of having been baptised."[186] On this basis, he deems it "quite absurd" to interpret the idea of a seed of future repentance and faith "as a present

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[178] Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 47.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Comm. Rom. 9.6, CO XLIX, 175, in Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 48.
[181] Ibid., 56.
[182] Ibid., 54.
[183] Ibid., 57.
[184] Ibid., 62.
[185] Ibid., 55.
[186] Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, 190.

possession of the child."[187] However, John Riggs points out that not only is the efficacy of the sacrament of baptism called into question by this metaphor, but also that the notion of the planting of a hidden seed, which then awaits the work of the Holy Spirit, "implies a nonpersonal divine activity that guarantees a result, such as planting a seed in the earth."[188] Whilst this idea is in line with the work of the Spirit in divine election and sanctification, it nevertheless creates inconsistencies within Calvin's baptismal theology, for it suggests that all infants baptised within the covenant community will grow into future faith. Whilst this is a key reason for maintaining that only those infants who are born to parents already within the covenant should be baptised, Calvin clearly acknowledges that not all infants belonging to that community grow into faith:

> I grant, indeed, that many which are the children of the faithful, according to the flesh, are counted bastards, and not legitimate, because they thrust themselves out of the holy progeny through their unbelief.[189]

Further, in light of the general and particular elections, even if they do believe, they might not be predestined to salvation. Thus, whilst it could be argued that the elect would not need to be baptised in order to be saved, who is to say that by discriminating for the infants of believers only, the grace of God is negated, and the font is fenced off to the elect? This idea is developed in light of Calvin's understanding of the resurrection, which made Abraham the father of all who believe:

> the boundaries of God's Kingdom began to extend far and wide among all nations generally, in order that according to Christ's saying, believers might be gathered together from everywhere to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in heavenly glory.[190]

From this perspective it could be argued that the hereditary character of the covenant is no longer relevant, for the covenant is open to all those who respond in faith to the love of God. On the one hand, this might limit the baptism of infants to those who could profess faith prior to baptism, but, on the other hand, it broadens the inheritance of the promises of God to all people. Milner highlights this contradiction in Calvin's theology, suggesting that

> Calvin falls back upon the hereditary character of the covenant to make his case, ascribing to the children of believers a "right to covenant," when, according to his own teaching it is precisely the racial-biological restrictions concerning the covenant's object which have been removed by the advent of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit."[191]

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[187] Ibid.

[188] Riggs, *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: An Historical and Practical Theology*, 86/69.

[189] Comm. On Acts 3:25, C.R. 48: 76 in Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, 194.

[190] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV*, 1335.

[191] Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 125.

Therefore, he proposes that "Calvin should have argued either for a baptism as universal in its scope as preaching, or for a baptism confined to adult … believers," because "even when allowance is made for the temporal freedom of the Spirit, the "basis for paedobaptism" is "destroyed."[192]

Scottish Reformation and the Westminster Tradition

Given Ian Dunlop's assertion that "generally speaking, Scotland's reformed theology followed Calvin's lead,"[193] it is hardly surprising to discover that the attitude of the Scottish Reformers towards infant baptism remained unchanged and that they "did little to challenge baptismal theology."[194] Taylor maintains that John Knox's "teaching on the sacraments is exactly that of Geneva,"[195] and it is indeed the case that the similarities between the doctrine of baptism expression in the *First Book of Discipline*, the *Scots Confession* and the *Book of Common Order*, and that found in Calvin's works, are apparent. Like Calvin, the Scottish Reformers believed that there were only two sacraments, that baptism was a sign and seal of first entrance into the church, and that infant baptism was essentially relevant, for reasons based primarily upon covenant theology. It is not insignificant that "in the Reformation period there is only *one* covenant – not two or three as in later times,"[196] and this too is in keeping with Calvin's understanding of the one covenant of grace. It is evident that God's covenant people are distinguished from those who are deemed to be "outsiders" by both Baptism and the Lord's Supper,[197] and that "the Scottish reformers, following Knox, saw the sacraments as divinely-given ordinances for God's on-going creative act of making His Church on earth."[198] In keeping with Calvin, the Scottish Reformers believed that salvation was only possible within the Church, and through election, proving itself in faith, the church would continue until the end of time:

> As we beleve in ane God, Father, Sonne, and haly Ghaist; sa do we maist constantly beleeve, that from the beginning there hes bene, and now is, and to the end of the warld sall be, ane Kirk, that is to say, ane company and multitude of men chosen of God, who richtly worship and imbrace him be trew faith in *Christ Jesus*,

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[192] Ibid.
[193] A. Ian Dunlop, "Baptism in Scotland after the Reformation," in Duncan Shaw (ed), *Reformation and Revolution: Essays Presented to The Very Rev. Hugh Watt* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press 1967), 84.
[194] Howard L. Rice and James C. Huffstutler, *Reformed Worship* (Louisville, Kentucky: Geneva Press 2001), 55.
[195] Maurice Taylor, "Scottish Reformation," in David McRoberts (ed.), *Essays on the Scottish Reformation, 1513-1625* (Glasgow: J.S. Burns 1962), 256.
[196] Dunlop, "Baptism in Scotland After the Reformation," 91.
[197] D.F. Wright, "Baptism," in David F. Wright, David C. Lachman, and Donald E. Meek (eds), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1993), 56.
[198] Dunlop, "Baptism in Scotland After the Reformation," 86.

> quha is the only head of the same Kirk, quhilk alswa is the bodie and spouse of *Christ Jesus*, quhilk Kirk is catholike, that is, universal, because it conteinis the Elect of all ages, of all realms, nations, and tongues, be they of the *Jewes*, or be they of the Gentiles, quha have communion and societie with God the Father, and with his Son *Christ Jesus*, throw the sanctification of his haly Spirit: and therefore it is called the communioun, not of prophane persones, bot of Saincts, quha as citizenis of the heavenly *Jerusalem*, have the fruitioun of the maist inestimable benefites, to wit, of ane God, ane Lord *Jesus*, ane faith, and ane baptisme: Out of the quhilk Kirk, there is nouther lyfe, nor eternall felicitie.[199]

Whilst much is made in this extract of the confession of an individual's faith, it is clear that the *Scots Confession* acknowledges that children who belong to faithful parents also have a place within the Church,[200] highlighting that family played an extremely important role in Scottish baptismal theology. In fact, the Interim Report of 1958, suggested that "the Scots Reformers regarded the family or the home as the basic unit of the Christian congregation."[201]

The Scottish Reformers maintained that "children were to be baptized in Church as soon after birth as possible,"[202] and the *Scots Confession* makes it clear that the baptism of infants belonging to those who were part of the church family was considered to be the norm:

> We confesse & acknowledge that Baptisme apperteinis asweil to the infants of the faithfull, as unto them that be of age and discretion: And so we damne the error of the *Anabaptists*, who denies baptisme to apperteine to Children, before that they have faith and understanding.[203]

This highlights, once again, the contextual discussions that were on going at the time with the Anabaptists, as well as the covenantal argument that was offered in defence of the practice of infant baptism. The 1958 report suggests that

> in contrast to some of the other Reformed Confessions and to the Federal theology that later dominated the Scottish Kirk, the Scots Confession acknowledges that a divine ordinance or covenant of grace is the grand theme of all history and all theology.[204]

As far as the Scottish Reformers were concerned, baptism was about being ingrafted into Jesus Christ and the sealing of the promise of the forgiveness of sins,[205] which, along with

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[199] Church of Scotland, *The Scots Confession: 1560, Article XVI*. (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press 1960), 42-43.
[200] Ibid., 43.
[201] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, 1958, 700.
[202] Ibid., 701.
[203] Church of Scotland, *The Scots Confession: 1560, Article XXIII,* 50-51.
[204] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, 1958, 694.
[205] Church of Scotland, *The Scots Confession: 1560, Article XXI*, 47.

the Lord's Supper, resulted in a clear differentiation between those who were part of the church and those who were not:

> And thir Sacramentes … not onelie to make ane visible difference betwixt his people and they that wes without his league: Bot also to exerce the faith of his Children, and, be participation of the same Sacramentes, to seill in their hearts the assurance of his promise, and of that most blessed conjunction, union and societie, quhilk the elect have with their head *Christ Jesus*.[206]

Within the one covenant of grace, no distinction is made between the visible and invisible church, but instead baptised into one body, one faith, one Lord, the only difference is between the church and the rest of society.

Of course, it could be argued that at this time membership into the church was synonymous with being part of society. This is particularly striking when it is noted that the Scottish Reformers doctrine of baptism was directed primarily towards infants, based upon the assumption that children would be baptised as soon as possible after birth, leaving little room for the baptism of adults. Nevertheless, it is clear that it was the children of adults already part of the covenant community that the Reformers had in mind:

> Then let us consider, dearly beloved, how Almighty God hath not only made us His children by adoption, and received us into the fellowship of His Church, but also hath promised that He will be our God, and the God of our children, unto the thousandth generation: Which thing, as He confirmed to His people of the Old Testament by the Sacrament of Circumcision, so hath He also renewed the same to us in His New Testament, by the Sacrament of Baptism; doing us thereby to wit, that our infants appertain to Him by covenant, and therefore ought not to be defrauded of those holy signs and badges whereby His children are known from Infidels and Pagans.[207]

Desiring to ensure that those infants baptised would be nurtured and grow up in the faith of their parents, the Reformers sought assurance from those presenting the child for baptism. This is made explicit within the *Book of Common Order* in the opening question put to the Father and Godfather of the child:

> Do ye here present this child to be baptized, earnestly desiring that he may be ingrafted in the mystical body of Jesus Christ?[208]

William McMillan highlights that "parents requiring Baptism for their offspring had to be able to repeat the Lord's Prayer and the Belief (the Apostles' Creed), and if they were

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[206] Ibid.
[207] *The Book of Common Order 1611*, in Peter J. Jagger, *Christian Initiation, 1552-1969: Rites of Baptism and Confirmation since the Reformation Period* (London: SPCK 1970), 164.
[208] Ibid., 163.

unable to do so then some other person who could was to present their child."[209] Thus, whilst it was acknowledged that it was not a "requisite that all those that received this Sacrament have the use of understanding and faith, but chiefly that they be contained under the name of God's people,"[210] it was important to make sure that that the baptised infant would be brought up in the knowledge of faith. Failure "to nurture and instruct them in the true knowledge and fear of God," would result, not only injury to the child by "hiding from them the goodwill and pleasure of Almighty God their Father," but it would "also heap damnation" upon the parents for making God's children "turn back from Him."[211] As a result, whilst prayers of intercession bid God to receive and take the infant into "Thy tuition and defence … and never suffer him to fall into such unkindness whereby he should lose the force of Baptism,"[212] in order that "coming to perfect age" the child "may confess Thee only, the true God, and whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ, and so serve Him, and be profitable unto His Church,[213] ultimately the responsibility appears to lie firstly with the parents, and eventually with the baptised adult individual.

Indeed, within the liturgy for baptism in the *Book of Common Order*, the congregation are reminded that by being present at the administration of baptism, they

> may have occasion as well to try our lives past as our present conversation, and to prove ourselves, whether we stand fast in the faith of God's Elect, or, contrariwise, have strayed from Him, through incredulity and ungodly living.[214]

Given that the "Scots Confession insisted that congregational discipline was essential as the third mark of the true church,"[215] it is unsurprising to discover that faith was believed to prove itself in action, and 'right living' was a sign of belonging to the people of God. Altogether, baptism into the covenant community was intended to strengthen the likelihood that infants would grow into future faith, brought about in the family home and the local church, the family of God. Nowhere is this most apparent than in the *Book of Discipline.* As well as highlighting the belief that the Reformers did not think that children who died without having been baptised would be damned,[216] it also outlined the

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[209] William McMillan, *The Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church, 1550-1638* (Cambridge: James Clarke Publishers 1931), 250.
[210] *The Book of Common Order 1611*, in Jagger, *Christian Initiation: 1525-1969*, 164.
[211] Ibid., 164-165.
[212] Ibid., 172.
[213] Ibid., 171.
[214] Ibid., 165.
[215] Michael F. Graham, "Scotland," in Andrew Pettegree (ed), *The Reformation World* (London/New York: Routledge 2002), 420.
[216] *The Book of Discipline, The Second Head; Of Sacraments*, in J.D.C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: the Reformation Period: some early reformed rites of baptism and confirmation and other contemporary documents* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 1970), 125.

importance of education as a means of benefitting the whole commonwealth. In particular, it emphasised the desire that children should be well versed in the catechism and before anything else, have attained knowledge of the Christian religion:

> The children must either proceed to farther knowledge, or else they must be sent to some handicraft, or to some other profitable exercise: provided always that first they have the form of knowledge of Christian religion, to wit, the knowledge of God's law and commandments, the use and office of the same, the chief articles of our belief, the right form to pray unto God, the number, use and effect of the sacraments, the true knowledge of Christ Jesus, of his office and natures, and such others [*other points*], as without the knowledge whereof neither deserveth any man to be named a Christian, neither ought any to be admitted to the participation of the Lord's Table. And therefore these principals ought and must be learned in the youth-hood.[217]

Thus, whilst being born to Christian parents was sufficient reason to allow baptism, efforts were made to ensure that the parents would raise their child in such a way that they might, in time, come to believe in God for themselves, and it was expected of all those within the visible church, that they would seek to live in such a way, that their faith was demonstrated in action. Such were the prerequisites for admission to the Table and on-going fellowship within the church.

The developments that occurred within baptismal theology between the Scottish Reformation and the emergence of the Westminster Tradition have been mentioned in chapter two, with the biggest change being the rise of federal theology, which began in Scotland with the work of Robert Rollock. The Special Commission believed that this raised questions pertaining to the relationship between the incarnation and atonement, the connection between justification and sanctification and ultimately the place of faith and grace within baptismal theology. However, it was not until the adoption of the Westminster Standards by the Church of Scotland in 1647, that federal theology was officially assumed and the issue of covenant theology came increasingly to the fore.

The Westminster Assembly was convened on the 1st July 1643, and "was the product not simply of the internal theological life of the church, but also of the economic, social, and political forces of the time."[218] Instigated by the English parliament, rather than the church, the Assembly has been described as "one of the most significant gatherings in the history of the post-Reformation Churches." Indeed, although only six Scottish laymen were

[217] Ibid.
[218] John H. Leith, *Assembly at Westminster: Reformed Theology in the Making* (Atlanta: John Knox Press 1973), 23.

involved in the delegations of the Assembly, "its documents have exercised an unparalleled Christian influence on the people of Scotland and on the history of Scottish theology."[219] Today, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (in somewhat amended form) remains the principal subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland. Its status has not been without controversy and debate, owing not least to the question of liberty of opinion relating to points of doctrine that are not of the substance of the faith. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms*, and the Westminster *Directory* offer an insight into the baptismal theology of the seventeenth century, and point towards the developments that were to occur as a consequence.

In chapter two the main points related to the Westminster Tradition, as understood by the Special Commission, were outlined. This emphasised the Westminster Assembly's belief that there were two covenants, it highlighted a theology of baptism that made an explicit distinction between the invisible and visible church, as well as confessing the view that the Body of Christ and the Kingdom of God were one and the same. The understanding of the covenant is apparent in Chapter VII of the *Confession of Faith*, which states that

> The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.[220]

As a consequence of the 'fall,' man was unable to preserve the first covenant, and so

> the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace: whereby he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.[221]

Within this understanding, the conditions of obedience and right living laid down in the covenant of life, as called by the *Larger Catechism*, were broken, and, as such, "the covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed."[222] Whilst the covenant is one of grace, it is evident that it demands faith from the individual, which is wholly dependent upon the work of God, who is active within the lives of the elect:

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[219] S.B. Ferguson, "Westminster Assembly and Documents," in David F. Wright, David C. Lachman, and Donald E. Meek (eds), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1993), 865.
[220] *The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter VII. Of God's Covenant with Man*, 13.
[221] Ibid.
[222] *The Larger Catechism*, 57.

> The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, and as the way which he hath appointed them to salvation.[223]

As a consequence of this, the covenant of grace applies only to those whom God has elected, with the result that the separation of the visible church from the invisible grew increasingly wider. Indeed, as previously mentioned, Chapter XXV of the *Confession* pertaining to the church, states that

> The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all … The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel, (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all these throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.[224]

In continuity with Reformed theology, the Westminster Confession maintains that children of believing parents belong to the visible church, and only on this basis may they be baptised. The Westminster *Directory* states that

> the promise is made to believers and their seed; and that the seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the Church, have, by their birth, interest in the Covenant, and right to the Seal of it, and to the outward privileges of the Church, under the Gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament.[225]

This is in keeping with the *Larger Catechism,* which makes it clear that

> Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but infants descended from parents, either both or but one of them professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are, in that respect, within the covenant, and to be baptized.[226]

It is significant to note that whilst the wording of the Westminster *Directory,* which the Commission believed "most fully preserves the old Scottish tradition,"[227] presumes that only children will be baptised:

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[223] Ibid.

[224] *The Westminster Confession of Faith,* Chapter XXV. Of the Church, 38-39.

[225] *The Westminster Directory* in Jagger, *Christian Initiation: 1525-1969,* 174.

[226] *The Larger Catechism,* 101.

[227] The Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, 1958, 722.

> The Child to be Baptized, after notice given to the Minister the day before, is the be presented by the Father, or (in case of his necessary absence) by some Christian friend in his place, professing his earnest desire that the Child may be Baptized;[228]

the other Westminster documents do not assume this to be the case. Instead, it would appear that several of them fully expect that some people will be initiated into the covenant community as adults, and, therefore, upon a profession of faith. Indeed, Chapter XXVIII of the Confession relating to baptism almost suggests that infant baptism will be the exception, rather than the rule:

> Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized.[229]

Whilst the Commission maintained, in their discussion of the Westminster Tradition, that infant baptism "is not a second-rate Baptism because [those being baptised] happen to be children,"[230] it does raise questions about the nature of the one baptism, the importance of faith, and the consequences for baptismal ecclesiology. This is particularly true when the implications of living out the calling of the baptised is considered. The *Directory*, not unlike the *Book of Common Order*, emphasises the importance of the baptised remembering their own baptisms, for "all who are Baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their Baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh." They are therefore encouraged to

> look back to their Baptism; to repent of their sins against their Covenant with God; to stir up their faith; to improve and make right use of their Baptism, and of the Covenant sealed thereby betwixt God and their souls.[231]

However, in many other places, it is apparent that faith is the result of 'effectual calling,' whereby through God's power and grace, faith is a gift given to the elect, who are the invisible church.[232] Apart from the issue it raises relating to infant baptism and the question of faith, it clearly sets apart the baptised from the world, creating "a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children,"[233] as well as separating all of the baptised from the elect. This results in an ecclesiology that appears to create two groups of people, those who are elect and saved, and those who are not. Yet, this is not unlike the Reformed theology discussed above. So

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[228] *The Westminster Directory* in Jagger, *Christian Initiation: 1525-1969*, 173.
[229] *The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXVIII. Of Baptism*, 42.
[230] The Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, 1958, 721.
[231] *The Westminster Directory* in Jagger, *Christian Initiation: 1525-1969*, 174.
[232] *The Larger Catechism*, 65.
[233] Ibid., 64.

what was the Special Commission's problem with the Westminster tradition and their understanding of the covenant?

In chapter two it was noted that the Special Commission blamed federal theology for the separation of the incarnation from the atonement, as a consequence of there being two covenants rather than one covenant of grace. They considered this to result in a divide between justification and sanctification, and an over emphasis upon the conditional offer of the gospel and a required response of faith. Torrance believed that federal theology had departed from Calvin's understanding of covenant. However, recent work focused on Reformed orthodoxy, challenges a binary reading of the Reformed tradition that makes too great a distinction between the scholastic, federal tradition and evangelical tradition. Macleod, in his review of Torrance's *Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell*, highlights Torrance's binary reading and Torrance's argument "that Calvinism (especially Scottish Calvinism) represented a radical breach with Calvin himself."[234] This leads Torrance to suggest that

> the later Scottish tradition was dominated by the legalistic, federalistic and deterministic perspectives of the Westminster Confession and these differed radically from Calvin and the Scots Confession.[235]

As such, Torrance's criticisms of the federal tradition centre on predestination, the extent of redemption, the lack of assurance rendered by the doctrine of limited atonement,[236] the free offer of the gospel and the emphasis upon an individual's response to God in the covenant of works. In the course of his paper, Macleod challenges Torrance's reading of the tradition. He suggests that Torrance "posits a radical discontinuity between later Scottish theology and the teaching on Calvin on the question of the extent of the atonement."[237] He highlights areas where Torrance's assertions are not bourn out in "historical reality,"[238] and he notes several instances where Torrance's claims are not supported by the "homiletical literature of Scotland."[239] Further, where Torrance is keen to correlate his "own precise theological outlook" with "the real giants of Scottish theology," Macleod demonstrates that this is not so.[240] Nowhere is this most apparent, than Torrance's belief in incarnational redemption. From this very brief overview, it appears that Torrance

[234] Donald Macleod, 57.
[235] Ibid., 58.
[236] Ibid., 64.
[237] Ibid., 60.
[238] Ibid., 63.
[239] Ibid., 64.
[240] Ibid., 67. Macleod uses the examples of Robert Bruce and Hugh Binning to demonstrate that they did not share Torrance's beliefs about incarnational redemption.

uses the theological works and concepts of others in order to advance his own theology and, in this instance, may well have reached the wrong conclusion.

This is suggested in the work of Muller who is critical of Torrance for his assertion that "covenant theology [is] a form of legalism and [is] a declension from the theology of the Reformers."[241] As noted above, there is much debate surrounding Calvin and his role in the development of federal theology. Muller suggests that in Torrance's reading

> The covenant of works appears as an illegitimate addition to Reformed theology that disturbs the priority of grace over works by asserting a historical and potentially a theological priority of law over grace or by misunderstanding the biblical concept of *berith* as a legal contract.[242]

Muller furthers this idea by asserting that Torrance and others

> take great pains to set covenant theology at odds with Calvin, explicitly for the sake of their own Calvinian theological project, and they typically proceed as if Reformed federalism were a monolith with little variety of formulation and with no clear sense of the relationship of the concept of a covenant of works to the doctrines of grace, Christ, and salvation.[243]

Further, Muller draws attention to Torrance's exegesis of *berith* and *diatheke* and believes it be incorrect, proposing that he "misunderstood and misrepresent the biblical concept as a legal contract rather than as a promise, an oath, a pledge or command."[244] From what has been inferred above by Macleod and others, it is evident that Torrance did use certain concepts for his own projects. Whether or not this is true in regards to his reading of federal theology remains debatable, but what is clear is that Muller provides an alternative reading. Muller suggests that there "is more continuity between the thought of Reformers such as Calvin … and the later federal thinkers than is typically indicated."[245] He argues that Torrance sought to emphasise the discontinuity, "by exaggerating Calvin's views on [the] prelapsarian graciousness of God," and "minimizing his comments on Adam's duties before God and God's law."[246] In Muller's analysis, law and grace are held together in equal measure, and a Reformed reading of federal theology, holds together the first and second Adam. Consequently, he can conclude, that despite doctrinal development in the Reformed tradition:

> The fundamental points of the doctrine, that the work of redemption must be understood both in terms of law and of grace, that human beings were created in

[241] Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003), 176.
[242] Ibid., 176-77.
[243] Ibid., 177.
[244] Ibid., 179.
[245] Ibid., 184.
[246] Ibid.

> and for fellowship with God under terms both of promise and of law, that Adam's fall was a transgression of God's law, that human inability after the Fall in now way removes the standard or the demands of the law, and that the gift of salvation through Christ's satisfaction for sin both sets believers free from the law's condemnation and upholds the law's demands, remain virtually identical. The free gift of grace in the one covenant respects the stability of law in the other, while the presence of law under different uses in both covenants echoes both the immutability of the divine nature and the constancy of the divine promises.[247]

Therefore, it could be suggested that Torrance's criticism of the Westminster tradition and federal theology was not only misguided, but unwarranted. Nevertheless, the criticisms waged by the Commission against federalism formed a substantial part of the 1958 report. The comparison with the Reformed tradition above suggests, on the whole, that the Commission were in accord with the Reformers. Yet, the preoccupation with the one covenant of grace, the need to ensure that the incarnation was not separated from the atonement and the importance of the objective nature of the sacrament, all suggest Torrance's influence.

A lot of this was concerned with Torrance's understanding of union with Christ. Duncan Rankin highlights the influence of John Craig's doctrine of union with Christ (Catechism of 1581), although he suggests that "Craig's 'carnal union' language is used by Torrance only once outside his lengthy introduction to The School of Faith."[248] Instead, as is Torrance's practice, he uses the concept introduced by Craig and adapts it to suit his theology. In his thesis, Rankin highlights Torrance's rejection of Craig's two-fold union with Christ, "one a 'carnal union' with Christ and the other a 'spiritual union' with Christ."[249] Instead, Torrance queries this separation:

> Is the spiritual union another union, a union in addition to our carnal union with Christ, or is it a sharing in the one and only union between God and man wrought out in Jesus Christ? That is a very important question, for if the spiritual union is an additional union, then our salvation depends not only on the finished work of Christ but upon something else as well which has later to be added on to it before it is real for us.[250]

For Torrance there was only one union and the importance of this could not be overstated:

> As against that grave aberration it must be insisted that there is only one union with Christ, that which He has wrought out with us in His birth and life and death and resurrection and in which he give us to share through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

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[247] Ibid., 189.
[248] William Duncan Rankin, 'Carnal Union with Christ in the Theology of T. F. Torrance.' Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of Edinburgh, 1997, 4.
[249] Ibid., 124.
[250] Torrance, School of Faith, cvii, cited in William Duncan Rankin, 'Carnal Union with Christ in the Theology of T. F. Torrance.' 124-5.

> The difference between these two views may appear very slight indeed at this point, but the implications of this difference are very far-reaching especially in the whole sphere of the life and work of the Church, in the doctrine of grace, and in our understanding of the Sacraments.[251]

Torrance's firm conviction regarding the doctrine of union with Christ and his need to ensure the Christocentric nature of baptism was support for his incarnational baptismal theology, which he believed justified the practice of infant baptism. Any hint that the covenant required a response of faith, was, for Torrance, a hindrance to the proposal that baptism was complete and fulfilled as a consequence of Christ's sanctification, brought about by his birth, life, death and resurrection. As a result, whilst the Special Commission acknowledged the importance of a response, they spent a great deal of time affirming the objective, passive and complete nature of baptism, to the extent that they failed to give equal measure to the Reformed importance of a confession of faith, spiritual development and discipleship.

In light of the historical overview of Reformed sacramental understanding and covenantal theology, it is clear that, on the whole, the Special Commission's work was aligned with the Reformed tradition. The terms of the 1963 Act outlined in the previous chapter are far from surprising. From the outset of the reports the normality of infant baptism had been promoted. Whilst at times that conclusion appears to have been reached from an argument of silence, there is no doubt that the Commission supported infant baptism, as well as the importance of children being raised in the context of faith and worship. Yet, given the strong link between baptism, incarnation and the vicarious nature of Christ, which is a strong and recurrent feature in the reports, this was not necessarily the terms that would have followed. Within that paradigm, it could have well been argued that Christ had sanctified all ages and people, rendering the need for the assurance of parental faith redundant. A universalist, more inclusive, approach could have been proposed that would have seen baptism being available to all people and not just infants. The absence of any mention of adult baptism within the terms is a notable admission, especially given the Commission's acknowledgement of Baptist teaching and the contextual changes, highlighted by Barth's theology, that were emerging. However, that too is not surprising. It is clear that the Commission were keen to ensure the Christocentric and objective nature of baptism, and any notions of baptism relying on conditional responses of faith, which focussed attention on the subjective nature of an individuals response was never going to

[251] Torrance, School of Faith, cvii-cviii, cited in William Duncan Rankin, 'Carnal Union with Christ in the Theology of T. F. Torrance.' 125.

be a realistic proposal by the Commission. However, the extent to which Act XVII 1963 was to influence the development of baptismal theology in the Church of Scotland after the life of the Special Commission must be considered and this will be done in the final chapter.

Chapter Four

The influence of the Special Commission on baptismal theology and practice in the Church of Scotland and developments since 1963

It is apparent that the Special Commission spent a great deal of time researching the doctrine of baptism and producing lengthy annual reports, which they hoped would clarify baptismal understanding and unify practice. This resulted in the final report, 'Biblical Doctrine of Baptism' and the 1963 Act XVII, which in regards to who could be baptised stated:

> 1.Baptism may be administered to a child –
>
> (1) whose parents, one or both, have themselves been baptized, are in full communion with the Church, and undertake the Christian upbringing of the child;
> (2) whose parents, one or both, having been baptized but not in full communion, are such that the Kirk Session is satisfied that he or she is an adherent permanently connected with the congregation and supporting the work and worship of the Church and will undertake the Christian upbringing of the child;
> (3) whose parents, one or both, have themselves been baptised, profess the Christian faith, undertake to ensure that such child grows up in the life and worship and express the desire to seek admission to full membership of the Church. In such cases the Kirk Session shall appoint the Elder of the District in which the parent resides, or some other person, to shepherd them into full communion and to exercise pastoral care of the child concerned.
> (4) who, being of unknown parentage, or otherwise separated from his or her parents, is in the view of the Kirk Session under Christian care and guardianship.[1]

However, it is apparent from the reception the reports received in the General Assembly that the Special Commission's work was not as well received and influential as they might have hoped. It has been suggested by James Whyte that

> The practical outcome of the Commission's labours was an act, Act XVII of 1963, regulating the admission of infants to baptism, which was so restrictive as to make it difficult for the Church of Scotland to function as a national Church. In terms of this Act the church is most readily seen as a fortress within a hostile society rather than as the heart of society.[2]

Whether this statement presents an accurate picture is open to debate, as will be seen below, but it does emphasise the emotive nature of the doctrine of baptism and raise questions about the influence that the work of the Special Commission and the subsequent Act had on the theology of baptism and practice in the Church of Scotland. This is

[1] Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1962, 722.
[2] James A. Whyte, "Church and Society in the Thought of John Baillie," in D Fergusson (eds.), *Christ, Church and Society: Essays on John Baillie and Donald Baillie* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1993), 247.

particularly significant when it is remembered that in its attempt to create uniformity, the 1963 report had recognised the importance of discovering the meaning of baptism and believed that doctrine should always regulate practice, and "not permit doctrine to be corrupted by the pressure of practical considerations."[3] Such an attitude reflects the Reformed theological tradition of the Church of Scotland, yet the pastoral implications of this approach, not to mention the fact that practice preceded doctrine in the early church, raises questions, not only about the purpose of doctrine, but the inter-relation between doctrine and practice. The 1963 Act is particularly interesting in this respect as it seems to introduce a practice that does not reflect the theological conclusions of the Commission's final report. To that end, the final chapter will explore some of the doctrinal, pastoral, ecumenical and liturgical developments that have occurred since 1963 within the life of the Church of Scotland, in order to assess the influence of the Special Commission on baptismal on theology and practice.

One of the most obvious places to begin when considering the Special Commission's influence upon the theology and practice of the church is the liturgical texts. In 1979 and 1994 the *Book of Common Order* was revised, and within both there are elements that indicate some of the Commission's thinking. Although the 1994 Order has significantly more suggested scriptural options, both *Orders* for infant baptism begin with Jesus' baptism (Mark 1.9-11), the dominical command (Matthew 28.18-20), and the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2.38-39). Whilst it might have been expected that the greatest influence of the Commission's work would be demonstrated in the 1979 liturgy, it is the 1994 *Order* that bears most of the marks of the Commission's theology. Whereas the 1979 liturgy had placed both the parental and the congregational confession of faith and promises prior to baptism, the 1994 liturgy situated the promises after. Thus, whilst recognising the importance of faith, it emphasised that the efficacy of baptism is not dependant upon the promises of others. James Kay suggests that this reinforces "the Reformed point that the vows of the parents and/or congregation are not, strictly speaking, baptismal vows."[4] This was very much in keeping with the Special Commission's stress upon the objective nature of baptism. Indeed, this is further demonstrated in 1994 in the opening statement that affirms:

> When Jesus was baptized in the waters of the Jordan, the Spirit of God came upon him. His baptism was completed through his dying and rising again. Our baptism is

[3] Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, 1962, 710.

[4] [4] James F. Kay, 'The new rites of baptism: a dogmatic assessment,' in Bryan D. Spinks and I.R.Torrance, I.R. (eds), *To Glorify God: Essays in Modern Reformed Liturgy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1999), 204.

> a sign of dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ. It is Christ himself who baptizes us.[5]

The inclusion of reference to the complete nature of baptism, as well as the inference that it is Christ himself who baptizes, is also in keeping with the work of the Commission. Similarly, the declaration included in the 1994 *Order* would have been endorsed by the Commission:

> *N* …, for you Jesus Christ came into the world: for you he lived and showed God's love; for you he suffered the darkness of Calvary and cried at the last, 'It is accomplished'; for you he triumphed over death and rose in newness of life; for you he ascended to reign at God's right hand. All this he did for you, *N* …, though you do not know it yet. And so the word of Scripture is fulfilled: 'We love because God loved us first.'[6]

Not only did this reinforce the passive nature of baptism, but it highlighted the importance of the whole of Christ's life from birth through to ascension. Furthermore, the inclusion of the word 'into' at the point of baptism: "*N* …, I baptize you in (*or* into) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,"[7] reinforced the Special Commission's emphasis upon union with Christ and the importance of the baptised being incorporated into the church. However, there is also some discontinuity with the work of the Commission.

One of the most notable features, which has been highlighted by James Kay,[8] is the absence of any explicit mention to the covenant. In the 1940 *Book of Common Order* it is stated:

> Though little children do not understand these things, yet is the promise also to them. They are heirs of the covenant of grace; and in holy Baptism God brings them into the family and household of faith, and makes them members of Christ, and citizens of the kingdom of heaven.[9]

However, in both the 1979 and 1994 liturgies, the covenant is inferred, rather than explicit: "The promise is for believers, and also for their children."[10] Whilst it is evident that both the 1979 and 1994 liturgies included *Orders* for the baptism of adults, the lack of reference to the covenant, and the placing of believers' first, was perhaps indicative of a bigger change that was to emerge.

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[5] Church of Scotland, *The Book of Common Order* (Edinburgh: St Andrew's Press 1994), 86.
[6] Ibid., 89-90.
[7] Ibid., 90.
[8] James F. Kay, 'The new rites of baptism: a dogmatic assessment,' 203.
[9] Church of Scotland, *Book of Common Order*, 1940, (CD Rom), 89.
[10] Church of Scotland, *Book of Common Order*, 1979, (CD Rom), 47.

Indeed, since 1963, the Act XVII has been re-visited on several occasions at subsequent meetings of the General Assembly, specifically in 1983, 1990/91 and 2003, in debates which focused on the question of re-baptism, on infant baptism, and the relationship between doctrine and practice. In 1983, following the instruction of the General Assembly the previous year, the Panel on Doctrine was instructed to "examine the relevant issues in relation to the Church's traditional doctrine and practice of baptism, studying the implications of, but not being bound by, the judgement in the *Boyd* case, and to report."[11] Acknowledging that "certain attitudes to baptism" were "giving rise to pastoral problems within the Church," the panel aimed to produce a statement that they hoped would be "shorter, more up-to-date and more easily understood by the ordinary member than the comprehensive statements issued by the Special Commission on Baptism."[12] What followed was a report in 1983 that restated much of what the Special Commission had asserted regarding the theology of baptism. The 1983 Report emphasised the Christocentricity of baptism, the passivity of the recipient, and the faithfulness of God in the past, present and future, highlighting that, because the "sacrament of baptism presupposes the One Baptism of Christ and the Pentecostal Baptism of the Church by the Holy Spirit, it belongs only within the life and discipline of the Church."[13] The report dealt with the issue of infant baptism under the heading of 'Households of the Covenant,' which was defended by the Panel based upon Jeremias' 'OIKOS formula,' the Gospel message and the New Covenant, all of which lead to the belief that "the grace of God invites rather than excludes the admission of little children."[14] From there, the report moved on to explore the issue of re-baptism under the heading 'The Doctrine of the One Baptism.' This was in response to the Boyd case mentioned above, which arose after a Church of Scotland elder of thirty years, Thomas Boyd, underwent second baptism in 1976 at his local Baptist Church and was then given the ultimatum by the Church of Scotland: repent or give up your office. Whilst recognising the practical and pastoral attraction of his decision, particularly for those who had been baptised as infants, and had since experienced the risen Christ and felt a desire to affirm their faith in him,[15] the 1983 report retained the position of the Special Commission (a practice that in turn reflects a long tradition of Christian theology) that baptism is a once and for all event, "a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, not a badge of our decision or conversion." Therefore, the report affirmed, "the efficacy of

[11] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 1982, 140. (See below for further discussion of this case).
[12] Ibid.
[13] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 1983, 155.
[14] Ibid., 156.
[15] Ibid., 158.

baptism depends on God's promises, not on ours."[16] Thus, even in response to the challenge of the Boyd case, which raised the question of personal faith and adult baptism, there was still no movement, at this time, to make baptism upon profession of faith part of the Act. Instead, in a report that also dealt with the ecumenical dimensions of one baptism and considered its ecclesiastical, social and missionary implications, the Church of Scotland re-affirmed its position on infant baptism and rebaptism, wholeheartedly rejecting any compromise or alternative approach in the form of infant dedication, on the basis that

> Anything which might tend to perplex Church members or to increase theological confusion by seeming to promote an apparent alternative to, a watered-down version of, or a half-way house towards baptism, is a disservice to Christ and to his message.[17]

In taking this position, the panel reinforced the 1963 Act and were keen to ensure that discipline was upheld, without undermining the unconditional nature of God's grace in the pastoral encounter. Its members therefore emphasised that the "Church of Scotland's application of discipline in regard to baptism and the care of the baptized may at times have left much to be desired,"[18] and hoped that a "firmer and more imaginative exercise of baptismal discipline should result in few confused and ill-considered requests for baptism."[19]

Evidently, this was not the case, for substantial portions of the subsequent reports dealing with baptism continued to be concerned with the practical out-workings of the 1963 Act. These gave rise in 1990 to the criticism levied by the Presbytery of Hamilton in 1990 that Act XVII was "unduly restrictive." The Presbytery stated:

> This overture does not seek in any way to unpick the work done by the Commission on Baptism, but to reappraise the situation with regard to the practical aspects of its administration.[20]

It proceeded to highlight the failure of Act XVII to achieve uniformity in practice and suggested that

> Clause I of Act XVII still does not reflect the diversity of belief and practice within the Church on this question, and, as a result, it is being ignored in many cases. It is unduly restrictive and it forces the parish minister to operate within a framework that no longer reflects our rapidly changing and mobile society.[21]

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 161.
[18] Ibid., 159.
[19] Ibid., 160.
[20] The verbatim minute of the General Assembly, 1990, 239.
[21] Ibid., 332.

To that end, the Presbytery of Hamilton suggested that "the wording of Act VII of 1933" would be "more appropriate for the mission of the Church as we move towards the twenty-first century."[22] Whilst the Panel on Doctrine agreed with the Presbytery's analysis, it was unwilling to support the proposal of reinstating Act VII of 1933, believing that "the mere requirement to have baptised parent, one or both, profess the Christian faith pragmatic and unedifying."[23] Having emphasised that the "abuse" of the Act "should not be a ground for adjusting legislation or doctrine," the Panel suggested that Act XVII 1963 should be retained, but that the following be inserted before (2):

> In exceptional circumstances where parents, one or both, are within the life and worship of the Church but conformity to the above provisions is not possible, Baptism may be administered at the discretion of the Minister and with the approval of the Kirk Session, within the evangelical mission and pastoral care of the Church. In all such cases the Presbytery Clerk shall be informed in writing. In such exceptional cases also the Kirk Session shall appoint the Elder of the District in which the parents reside, or some other person, to seek to shepherd them into full communion and to exercise pastoral care of the child concerned for as long as is necessary.[24]

The Panel concluded the 1991 report regarding eligibility for infant baptism by reiterating that this "exceptional provision" offered "no encouragement to indiscriminate baptism" and instead, reaffirmed the 1962 statement of the Special Commission that asserted "that the locus of Baptism is 'where the gospel is proclaimed and believed' and 'within the community where the mighty acts of God in Christ are effectively operative through the Word and Spirit'."[25] It recognised suggested that its "recommendation [was] modest" but that "in response to Hamilton's genuine concern we make room in our baptismal practice for a modicum of evangelical and pastoral manoeuvre."[26]

Even as this debate called into question the freedom of the Holy Spirit to move where it wills, in the process of trying to walk a tightrope of pastoral sensitivity and uphold Church Law, it only dealt with one aspect of the issue that had prompted the Presbytery of Hamilton's overture; namely, the fact that the Act did not "exhaustively describe those who fall within the life and discipline of the Church."[27] Much of the discussion surrounding this overture concerned itself with the importance of mission, and raised

[22] Ibid.
[23] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 1991, 223.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Verbatim minute of the General Assembly, 1991, 472.
[27] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 1991, 223.

fundamental questions about baptism, membership and what constitutes belonging; an issue that was to become increasingly important as the number of baptism dropped steeply.

Exploration of the connection between baptism and mission proved to be far from harmonious or straightforward. In a study of 'Infant Baptism and Mission and Evangelism in the Church of Scotland: 1963-1997,' undertaken by National Mission, the respondents highlighted the contentious nature of these questions. This study focused upon the effect of and attitudes towards the 1963 Act anent the Administration of Baptism to Infants, in order to establish whether or not respondents believed that changes should be made to the Church of Scotland's baptismal policy. The study asserted that

> Baptism as a Sacrament is intrinsically associated with the advance of the Church's mission, whether geographically or from generation to generation.[28]

However, some of the responses to the Ministers' survey revealed a quite different understanding, highlighting the opinion that baptismal policy was "strictly irrelevant when mission and evangelism are concerned."[29] Responses included, "baptism has NOTHING to do with mission or evangelism," "I regard it as dangerous to regard a Sacrament of the church as a tool of evangelism," and "Infant baptism is not a tool of evangelism – to use it as such is very near to prostituting the Sacraments."[30] Nevertheless, overall, when asked whether the Act

> helped or hindered the mission and evangelism of the Church, 49 per cent of responding Ministers chose the options 'very helpful' or 'helpful' as against the 22 per cent who preferred 'hindrance' or 'serious hindrance.' (28 per cent took the middle of the five options: 'irrelevant'). Asked the same question, Kirk Sessions responded 47 per cent to 13 per cent in favour of the positive options, with 36 per cent in the middle.[31]

Further investigations of these responses indicated that whilst the majority believed that the church's baptismal policy had a positive impact on mission, there were three groups who were opposed to the principles expressed within the Act:

> those who do not believe infant baptism to be theological justified; opposition from those who believe the Act seeks to restrict access to Christ; and from those who feel rejected by the Church.[32]

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[28] Report to the General Assembly 1999 by National Mission, 'Infant Baptism and Mission and Evangelism in the Church of Scotland: 1963-1997,' 11.1.3, 20/67.
[29] Ibid., 11.3.1, 20/71.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 11.5.1, 20/73.

The theme of grace, although not explicitly stated, is pertinent in all three of these areas. Whilst the first group of dissenters was prompted by the belief that it is grace through faith in Jesus Christ that brings salvation, and that, therefore, only believers can receive the benefits of baptism, the other two oppositions stand in contrast. They point towards the grace of God and the way in which discriminate baptism acts as a restrictive measure and barrier to Christ, leading to offence and the church being viewed as "demonstrating its separation and foreignness."[33] This led some to suggest that "our baptismal regulations are not framed with reality in mind," and that whilst the "majority of the populace are not church members … many believe in God," leading to the assertion that "it is the church's duty to open their doors (and arms) to them."[34]

The significance of baptism in mission was also highlighted by research undertaken by *Christian Research* on behalf of National Mission, which revealed anger and outrage from those who "either were not members of any Church or, if they were, were inactive or lapsed"[35] in response to the Church of Scotland's baptismal policy. This drew on the findings from four focus groups, all of which affirmed the belief that "the Church should not discriminate," because "the Church is a public institution and thus open to all."[36] Within these groups, baptism was "seen as God blessing the child in some mysterious way, perhaps even akin to vaccination,"[37] and the "idea of children being rejected by a Church that proclaims to all its 'Welcome' infuriated most of those attending from the periphery."[38] This sense of reaction was also evident among people within areas which the report described "frontiers" of the Church's mission, which included UPA parishes, Extension charges, and hospital, university and HM Armed forces chaplaincies.[39]

On the basis of its survey, *Christian Research* concluded "that for those in their group from a Glasgow 'scheme'," the baptismal policy of the Church of Scotland "was not understood and formed simply one more barrier between them and God as represented by the Church."[40] Indeed, one Minister had commented that

> the Church demonstrates that it is just another of the Authorities that continually refuse, ignore, question, frustrate, suspect, distrust and demean people's motives, desires and requests.[41]

[33] Ibid., 11.5.3.1, 20/74.
[34] Ibid.,11.5.3.2, 20/74.
[35] Ibid., 11.5.4.1, 20/74.
[36] Ibid., 11.5.4.3, 20/75.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 11.5.4.4, 20/75.
[39] Ibid., 11.6.1.1, 20/76.
[40] Ibid., 11.6.1.2, 20/76.
[41] Ibid.

Baptism, for these groups, was clearly related to (a failure of) mission. In an attempt to alleviate this impression, within the context of the various chaplaincies a more open approach was both practised and welcomed. One naval chaplain commented that "to refuse baptism confuses and alienates;" consequently, he paid "little attention to the 1963 Act."[42] By far the most open approach to baptism was demonstrated by hospital chaplains, who were often asked to baptise infants in the most extreme and tragic of circumstances. Their response to these pastoral crises revealed tensions between the practices of chaplains and parish ministers, particularly, but not only, as a consequence of the NHS rules on confidentiality, which prevented chaplains informing parish ministers of baptisms celebrated in hospital. The report concluded that this led to a situation in which "the sacrament could be disjoined from the fellowship of the wider body of Christ," thus "undercut[ting] the basic theological principles commended by the Special Commission and ecumenical opinion."[43] The practice of emergency baptism appears to have been justified by hospital chaplains as a consequence of the belief that "at that life and death moment baptism is a purely missionary act of the church, exhibiting the saving eternal love of God."[44] In such dire circumstances, almost all chaplain respondents "stated a readiness to baptise an infant in a life-threatening illness," highlighting that "circumstances takes precedence over all others."[45] As a consequence, 15 of the 34 chaplains who responded favoured "the repeal and replacement of the Act,"[46] with one going as far as to suggest, "theologically there is no difference, and in terms of mission there are just as many pastoral grounds for baptising when the baby is expected to live!"[47]

The *Christian Research* survey demonstrated the pastoral pressures, internal conflicts and general confusion that existed in relation to the sacrament of baptism. Whilst the issue of inconsistent practice, lack of follow up, and the question of responsibility were all areas that could be agreed upon as problematic, 58 per cent of the 647 respondents believed that the 1963 Act should not be repealed, whilst 36 per cent thought that it should.[48] Those who believed that the Act should be retained, highlighted the importance of doctrine, affirming that "any change would dilute the Act and … would produce something that would be consumer-driven not doctrine led."[49] Of those who wanted to see the Act repealed, there

[42] Ibid., 11.6.2.3, 20/76.
[43] Ibid., 11.6.2.14, 20/78-20/79.
[44] Ibid., 11.6.2.8, 20/78.
[45] Ibid., 11.6.2.12, 20/78.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 11.6.2.13, 20/78.
[48] Ibid., 11.9.1.1, 20/87.
[49] Ibid., 11.9.1.2, 20/87.

was a call for clarity as to the sacrament's key element: was baptism about grace or faith. This would in turn determine how open or closed the sacrament should be.[50] Some respondents suggested that in order to make the sacrament more open, "baptism should rest on the faith of people other than parents," including grandparents and church members invited to be sponsors.[51] Others appeared to desire an even stricter Act, urging the church to "allow for the baptism of those under the direct care of a communicant member ONLY," suggesting " 'baptism on demand' is harmful to both parents and children," and that "in a post-Christian society we are simply fooling ourselves if we think that making Baptism an easy option is going to help create a vibrant church."[52] In the face of this disagreement, the Working Party concluded: "to promote greater uniformity of practice through a new Baptismal Act would in fact be likely to give rise to greater disharmony in the Church." From this rather confused, but very real picture, it can be said that there is not only an evident disagreement, not only among Ministers and those that would consider themselves part of the Church regarding the baptismal policy of the Kirk, but also a real sense of alienation from those on the edges of society, who are often in the greatest need, and who feel themselves rejected and excluded by a Church which appears to disregard and dismiss their baptismal requests. In light of all of this, what is the Church of Scotland to make of the reports responses? In particular, what is the implication of the suggestion that "until men and women are drawn into the missionary enterprise of the church, they do not discover the meaning of their baptism?"[53] This does seem to imply that the baptised have to be part of the church community in order to understand fully it's meaning, and this leads to the vexed question of the relationship between baptism and membership.

The 1970s witnessed the appointment, by the General Assembly, of a Special Committee anent Church membership to explore the question of what it meant to be a member of the church. At that time, the concern (once again) had been "to ensure that ministers and Kirk Sessions adhere to the provisions of Act XVII 1963 anent the Administration of Baptism to Infants"[54] and to consider deal the Act VI 1938 dealing with the Keeping of Communion Rolls and Pastoral Supervision. It became clear during that report that participation was a key factor in defining church membership. This is evident in the authority given to Kirk Sessions during the annual revision of the Communion Roll to personally enquire of

[50] Ibid., 11.9.1.3, 20/87.
[51] Ibid., 11.9.1.5, 20/87.
[52] Ibid., 11.9.1.4, 20/87.
[53] Gibson Winter, cited by J. G. Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 91, in Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (India: Paternoster Press 2009), 145.
[54] Report of the Special Committee Anent Church Membership, 1976, 461.

individuals who had not attended Communion in the previous year, or had not, "in the opinion of the Kirk Session, shown sufficient interest or taken an adequate share in the worship, mission and service of the Church."[55] If a satisfactory response was not given "on the question of a member's adherence to the vows of Church membership," then the Kirk Session had the power and authority to remove that person from the Communion Roll.[56]

However, it also became clear that there was also a divergence in opinion regarding what constituted church membership. At various points in the reports it was affirmed that "strictly speaking, all baptised persons are members of the Church,"[57] and that "the meaning of Church Membership is to be found in the meaning of Baptism."[58] This was the position taken by the Special Commission on Baptism. However, within that understanding it was acknowledged by the report that two types of membership exist: baptised members and communicant members. This dual membership was a result of the relationship between membership and confirmation:

> There is a real sense in which baptised persons are members of the Church, grafted into the Body of Christ, baptised by one Spirit into one Body. But it has been customary to speak of "full membership" as something which follows from Confirmation and Admission, and in practice the Church recognizes a distinction between baptised members and communicant members.[59]

The Special Committee attempted to overcome this division, with the suggestion that there is the possibility of thinking of "membership not so much in categories … as in terms of one continuous process of organic growth."[60] In 1977, in concluded that

> The meaning of Church Membership is to be found in what Baptism effects, and the implications of Church Membership are to be found in what Baptism expects.[61]

However, this begs the question, what does baptism effect and expect? Not for the first time, confusion and uncertainty reigned in the Church of Scotland regarding this question. When it came to infant baptism, which at this time was still emphatically considered the norm, on the one hand it was viewed as complete in and of itself; on the other hand, it was seen to be only a preliminary step into the privileges of 'full' membership, which would only occur upon profession of public faith and assent to a set of particular vows. Even then, the Kirk Session was additionally

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[55] Ibid., 462.
[56] Ibid., 465.
[57] Report to the General Assembly 1975 by the Special Committee anent Church Membership, 495.
[58] Report to the General Assembly 1977 by the Special Committee anent Church Membership, 461.
[59] Report to the General Assembly 1973 by the Special Committee anent Church Membership, 615-616.
[60] Report to the General Assembly 1976 by the Special Committee anent Church Membership, 463.
[61] Report to the General Assembly 1977 by the Special Committee anent Church Membership, 461.

> required to satisfy itself as to their profession of faith in Christ Jesus, their knowledge of the doctrine and practice of the Church, and their Christian character; and, being satisfied, to resolve to admit them to full Communion.[62]

The Special Committee advised pastoral sensitivity in these matters was advised and Kirk Sessions were urged to "exercise great caution in terminating [the] membership" of someone who had "made vows of membership and been admitted to the fellowship of the Lord's Table."[63] Yet, is it even possible, theologically speaking, to terminate the membership of someone who has been baptised into the body of Christ? Certainly, some may lapse, fall away, and even reject the faith with which they have been surrounded as a child or which they have personally professed. The Special Commission, and the Reformers before them, had affirmed that belief. Yet, it is questionable whether the Church has the power or right to decide that they are not members of the Church. These issues become still more complicated when the issue of baptised children and initiation is explored.

This was a theme which appeared in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* in 1980 under the title *'Baptised children, Confirmation and Holy Communion,* by Rev Finlay MacDonald. The "uncertain understanding of the relation between baptism, confirmation, admission to the Lord's Supper and membership of the Church"[64] was stressed in this article, and the author came to the conclusion that

> When it comes to the spiritual nourishment of God's people it would seem to me to follow from the sheer understanding of church membership not as belonging to a religious club but as being ingrafted into Christ, that all the members should receive the benefits which are in him and so be enabled to grow in grace.[65]

From this it could be concluded that baptism alone is sufficient to warrant welcome at the table, regardless of age or regular attendance and no further initiation is required.
So far as the Special Commission was concerned in 1963, baptism was complete in and of itself, and because of Christ's vicarious sacrifice, it needed no additional sacraments to make it efficacious. Baptism was the only sacrament necessary to ensure membership into the church and little is said of Confirmation or the ethical out workings of the baptised in discipleship. In the years proceeding the Special Commission, however, it became increasingly clear, especially as a consequence of ecumenical discussions, that the issue of

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[62] *Book of Common Order*, 1994, 95.
[63] Report of the Special Committee Anent Church Membership, 1976, 41.
[64] Finlay MacDonald, "Baptised Children, Confirmation and Holy Communion," in *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, 33.6 (1980), 554.
[65] Ibid., 561.

sacramental initiation was at the forefront of discussions. The processional nature of initiation, that "one continuous process of organic growth"[66] mentioned above, was being explored.

Whilst Martha Moore-Keish has suggested that "Presbyterian churches are largely unaware of, or indifferent to, the early church practice of unified rites of initiation,"[67] the Church of Scotland is certainly aware of early church practices (evident in the reports of the Special Commission), and has regularly both participated in and, in its own documents, made reference to, ecumenical discussions. And it is in the context of these that the question of whether baptism should be regarded as full sacramental initiation has received most attention. This is perhaps most noticeable in relation to the World Council of Churches' report, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982). Among churches that were both members and non-members, BEM witnessed to a "convergence on major issues," some of which had divided the church on many occasions for centuries.[68] This is apparent in the case of baptism, with many responses to the document demonstrating agreement and unity in their understanding of baptism and its theology.[69] In the introduction the section on Baptism, pertaining to the institution of baptism, BEM affirms:

> Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, in his death and in his resurrection. It is incorporation into Christ, who is the crucified and risen Lord; it is entry in the New Covenant between God and God's people. Baptism is a gift of God, and is administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[70]

Here, before the reader even gets to the section relating to the significance of baptism, the Christocentric nature of the sacrament is expressed, and the terms, 'incorporation' and 'entry' are introduced. These are expounded in the next section, which explore the meaning of baptism under five sub-headings, two of which deal directly with the relationship between Christ and the baptised: 'Participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection' and 'Incorporation into the Body of Christ.' Here it is suggested that "Baptism means participating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,"[71] in order to bring about liberation from the power of sin; baptism is also a sign and seal through which "Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church

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[66] Report to the General Assembly 1976 by the Special Committee anent Church Membership, 463.
[67] Martha Moore-Keish, "Baptism in the Presbyterian Reformed Tradition," in Thomas F. Best (ed.), *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Pueblo 2008), 70.
[68] Ibid., vii-viii.
[69] World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses* (Switzerland: WCC Publications 1990), 54.
[70] World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: Faith and Order Paper No. 111 1982), 2.
[71] Ibid.

of ever time and place."[72] It is acknowledged, however, that, although Christians share the one baptism, and are therefore part of one body, division and brokenness have often been the witness of the church.[73] Nevertheless, the emphasis on unity offers an ideal to be strived after, not least in relation to initiation.

However, there are real differences in understanding the relationship between baptism and initiation. The Roman Catholic Church, as Walsh points out, would maintain that baptism alone does not constitute complete sacramental initiation, because, as Roman Catholic teaching holds, "it takes three sacraments [i.e. baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist] to initiate a person into full Christian life."[74] To suggest otherwise, and "confront human life with one of the sacraments of initiation in isolation," would be "to run the risk of giving a misleading view of the gift of life that God offers."[75] Rather, the Roman Catholic Church affirms that

> Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist together constitute a single process of initiation. One is not simply handed a membership card. One is fully introduced into the Spirit-filled life of the community which is God's people and Christ's body.[76]

The Roman Catholic Church, continuing the practice of the early church, has always had a strong commitment to pre-catechumenate of adult baptismal candidates, as well as post Christian formation, particularly in the 'Great Fifty Days' between Easter and Pentecost. Its focus on the various stages of initiation, and on baptism's close relationship with Confirmation and the Eucharist, has led to a stronger emphasis on baptism as a process, rather than simply a rite of passage. Following the Second Vatican Council, the 1972 *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) sought to re-introduced what it understood to be the early practice of the church, and emphasised the processional nature of baptism, as well as the responsibilities of the baptised. Indeed, Kelly asserts that

> the return to the ancient sources, on which the liturgical renewal has been based, is resulting in a breath of fresh air blowing through the church. The practice of baptism is leading to a renewal of Christian life.[77]

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[72] Ibid., 3.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Liam G. Walsh, (2nd), *Sacraments of Initiation: A Theology of Rite, Word, and Life* (U.S.A: Hillenbrand Books 2011), 92.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Richard McBrien, 3rd, *Catholicism*, 807.
[77] Gerard Kelly, "Baptism in the Roman Catholic Church," in Heath, Gordon L. Heath and James D. Dvorak (eds), *Baptism: Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Ontario: Pickwick Publications 2011), 52.

The practice of the early church has strongly influenced the RCIA, evident in the four stages or periods outlined by McBrien: "(1) the pre-catechumenate, in which there is initial evangelization; (2) the catechumenate, in which there is continued evangelization and catechesis; (3) the period of immediate preparation for and reception of the sacraments of initiation; and (4) the post-initiation catechesis (*mystagogia*) and more active participation in the mission of the community."[78] Thus, the "RCIA takes place over a long period of time, indicating that initiation is a gradual process, a 'spiritual journey'."[79] Besides this emphasis on the processional nature of initiation, it has also been suggested by McBrien that there have been four major developments in Roman Catholic baptismal doctrine and practice since the Second Vatican Council. These are: a change in what is considered to be the 'premier rite' of baptism; an emphasis that Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist "constituted a single process of initiation;" the shift to understanding the sacrament to be less about "personal sanctification" and more about being inspired to fulfil the church's mission in the world; and the conviction that membership is not about "individual salvation" but is "for participation in the saving work of God, in Christ, through the Church."[80] One of the significant features of the RCIA was that it restored the adult catechumenate as the theological norm of initiation, which Johnson suggests was "followed by many other churches in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[81] McBrien goes as far as to claim:

> The initiation of *adults* is the pastoral norm, not the exception. The new rite underscores the *unity among the sacraments*, their close relationship with the *mission of the church*, and the *responsibility of the local church* to share in the candidates' growth in faith.[82]

In this understanding baptism is considered to be "only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed towards the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ."[83] Roman Catholics believe that baptism is directed "toward a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation such as Christ Himself willed it to be, and finally, toward a complete participation in Eucharistic communion."[84] Within that framework, complete sacramental initiation only occurs once all three elements have been

[78] Richard McBrien, 3rd, *Catholicism*, 813-814.
[79] Gerard Kelly, "Baptism in the Roman Catholic Church," in Heath, Gordon L. Heath and James D. Dvorak (eds), *Baptism: Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives*,30.
[80] Richard McBrien, 3rd, *Catholicism*, 807.
[81] Maxell E. Johnson, (ed), *Sacraments and Worship: Key readings in the history and theology of Christian worship from the New Testament to the present*, 168.
[82] Richard McBrien, 3rd, *Catholicism* (Great Britain: Geoffrey Chapman 1993), 831
[83] Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology* (Collegville, Minn: Liturgical Press 1992), 117.
[84] Ibid.

fulfilled, and is very much bound up with personal growth in the life of the body of Christ; this, in turn, has a missiological outworking.

It is not only the Roman Catholics who are engaging in this renewal; since the 1960s, the Anglican Church has also been experiencing a period of change, thanks to the influence of the Liturgical Movement, the Anglican response to the Second Vatican Council and Anglican engagement in ecumenical dialogue.[85] Alongside questions around baptismal practice, catechesis, communion, membership and ecumenical relations, the Anglican debates have called into question the theology of Christian Initiation and the purpose it serves within the life and work of the Church. Most notably, Hayes suggests that "the pre-1960 pattern of infant baptism, childhood Christian education, and confirmation in early adolescence followed by first communion, is now a minority practice."[86] Whilst this statistic could be challenged, there is no doubt that many Anglican churches have, in their conduct of adult baptisms, sought to return confirmation to its original place immediately following baptism, thus making it a single rite. Nevertheless, it is evident that baptismal theology and initiatory practice in the Anglican Communion remain live and controversial issues. Bradshaw is right to assert:

> Baptismal rites in the Anglican Communion today reflect a church still in transition as regards its theology of baptism and confirmation, and not one that has reached a plateau on which it is likely to rest for long.[87]

The most heated Anglican discussions of baptism have centre on the question of Baptism as Complete Sacramental Initiation [BACSI], which Avis believes has, wrongly, "achieved the status of unquestioned orthodoxy."[88] Whilst he is quick to affirm that "defenders of BACSI are right to say that Baptism cannot be 'completed' or 'topped up' in any way,"[89] Avis points out that "it does not follow … that baptism comprises the whole of initiation."[90] It may well be "complete as baptism, but not complete as initiation into the

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85 Alan L. Hayes, "Baptism in the Anglican Communion" in Gordon L. Heath and Dvorak, James D. Dvoark (eds.), *Baptism: Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Ontario: Pickwick Publications 2011), 129.
86 Ibid., 132.
87 Ibid., 60.
88 Paul Avis, "Is baptism 'complete sacramental initiation'?," in Paul Avis (ed), *The Journey of Christian Initiation: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives (*London: Church House Publishing 2011), 6.
89 Paul Avis, "Baptism and the Journey of Christian Initiation," in Lizette Larson-Miller and Walter Knowles (eds), *Drenched in Grace: Essays in Baptismal Ecclesiology Inspired by the Work and Ministry of Louis Weil* (U.S.A: Pickwick Publications 2013), 54.
90 Paul Avis, "Is baptism 'complete sacramental initiation'?," in Paul Avis (ed), *The Journey of Christian Initiation: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives,* 11.

life of grace in the church."[91] Avis's position challenges the 1971 Ely Report, *Christian Initiation: Birth and Growth in the Christian Society*, as well as the conclusions reached by the Fourth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation in Toronto, laid out in the document, *Walk in Newness of Life* (1991). However, the Ely Report itself is rather inconsistent in places. On the one hand it suggests that "Initiation into the Church through Baptism is to be understood as the beginning of a process."[92] On the other hand, it affirms that "the Church should make explicit its recognition of Baptism as the full and complete rite of Christian initiation."[93] Its key underlying argument was that whilst important to renewal of faith, confirmation was "in no way to be seen as a completion of baptism or as necessary for admission to communion."[94] Instead, baptism was recognized as a full and complete rite of Christian initiation, and this position was re-affirmed by the 1991 Toronto Statement.[95] However, recent documents, such as *Growing in Newness of Life: Christian Initiation in Anglicanism Today* (1993), *On the Way: Towards and Integrated Approach to Christian Initiation* (Liturgical Commission of the Church of England, 1995) and most recently, *The Journey of Christian Initiation: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives* (Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, 2011), have challenged this notion. The reasons for this are already present in the Ely Report. In paragraph 77 of the Ely report, it is affirmed that

> Nothing more can be added to the sacrament of Baptism which effects and signifies the coming of the gospel to men and their response of faith. What is given in Baptism has, of course, to be explicated over the whole course of the Christian life.[96]

The acknowledgement that the gift anticipated in baptism is fulfilled, points towards the soteriological nature of the sacrament, and the belief that in, with and through Christ, salvation is complete. However, when salvation is considered in relation to the Christian life, and it is believed that salvation itself is a process – Christians are not saved, rather they are in the process of *being* saved – it follows that baptism, as initiation, is not complete. Avis is, in my opinion, correct to suggest "it does not follow from the momentous soteriological significance of baptism that baptism is complete Christian

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[91] Paul Avis, "Baptism and the Journey of Christian Initiation," in Lizette Larson-Miller and Walter Knowles (eds), *Drenched in Grace: Essays in Baptismal Ecclesiology Inspired by the Work and Ministry of Louis Weil*, 55.
[92] General Synod of the Church of England, The Report of the Commission on Christian Initiation, *Christian Initiation: Birth and Growth in the Christian Society* (London: Wightman Mountain Ltd 1971), paragraph 13.
[93] Ibid., paragraph 69.
[94] Paul F. Bradshaw, "Baptism in the Anglican Communion," in Thomas F. Best (ed), *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Pueblo 2008) 55.
[95] David R. Holeton (ed.), *Growing in Newness of Life: Christian Initiation in Anglicanism today* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre 1993), 5.
[96] Church of England, Christian Initiation: Birth and Growth in the Christian Society, Point 77.

initiation, or even complete sacramental initiation. It is complete as baptism."[97] For him, as for many others, the importance of faith, nurture, and community makes it impossible for baptism to be complete sacramental initiation:

> Can we be initiated into Christ and his Body without, in every individual case, young or old, undergoing instruction and teaching about the faith into which we are to be baptized? Does it make sense to say that we have been completely initiated as Christ's disciples if we have not yet had an opportunity publicly to confess our faith in him? Have we received all that God has to give us if we have not received the strengthening of the Holy Spirit for discipleship through the laying on of hands and prayer, following the apostolic pattern? Finally, is it credible to insist that we have been fully and completely initiated into the Body of Christ when we have not participated in the celebration of the Eucharist, and, as part of that, received sacramentally his body and blood?[98]

As is clear from this passage, Avis concludes that it is only after the baptised have received the Eucharist that they are "fully inducted into the life of grace," and only then are they "full-fledged disciples, spiritually equipped and prepared for witness and ministry."[99] This conviction is reflected in the Church of England's revised liturgy, *Common Worship* (2000), which sets out very clearly that Christian initiation is a process, and suggests that "the celebration of baptism should not be seen in isolation from the journey to faith in Christ," which is "itself a process of discovery and transformation within a community."[100]

In the revised *Common Worship* baptismal liturgy, introduced in 2006, the Church of England has recently introduced the opportunity to include personal testimonies in the service of baptism. The liturgy also includes the option of a 'commission' in the liturgy, intended to remind both the candidate(s) and the congregation that "baptism is process, an initiation into a community of hope, and merely the beginning of an on-going journey."[101] The rich use of symbols in the form of anointing, candles, and robes in the new baptismal liturgy in *Common Worship* also the processional nature of baptism. Nonetheless, Hayes suggests:

> Although all Anglicans can officially agree that baptism is an obligation and promise of the gospel, it seems unlikely that in the foreseeable future they will agree on when, how, where, or precisely why it should be done, or what its implications are for a person's life in Christ or membership in the church.[102]

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[97] Paul Avis, "Is baptism 'complete sacramental initiation'?," in Paul Avis (ed.), *The Journey of Christian Initiation: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, 15.
[98] Paul Avis, "Is baptism 'complete sacramental initiation'?," in Paul Avis (ed.), *The Journey of Christian Initiation: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives (*London: Church House Publishing 2011), 15.
[99] Ibid., 21.
[100] Church of England, *Common Worship: Christian Initiation* (London: Church House Publishing 2006), 8. The baptismal liturgy was the first to be revised and was published and authorised in 1998.
[101] Bradshaw, "Baptism in the Anglican Communion," 57-58.
[102] Hayes, "Baptism in the Anglican Communion," 135.

The parallels between these developments and the approach taken by the Roman Catholic Church are clear. They have subsequently resulted in the Church of England, in "the provision for a formal catechumenate with appropriate rites to mark stages of the way to baptism, along the lines of the RCIA."[103] The recognition of the vital importance of faith, discipleship and Christian nurture to Christian initiation is central.

When it comes to the themes of baptism and initiation as understood by Baptist Churches, the importance of faith and discipleship again cannot be underestimated. Whilst Anthony Cross highlights the "impoverished nature of Baptist baptismal theology"[104] that has persisted, he nevertheless applauds the new perspectives and theological developments that have emerged more recently. Here too, Cross suggests, one of the major developments has been the exploration of the concept of initiation, which underlies what he sees as "the shift from the either-or of believer's baptism or infant baptism … to discussion of the broader subject of Christian initiation."[105] In making this claim, however, it is important to recognise that the Baptists have neither set liturgies nor a defined corpus of belief or an agreed confessional statement:

> There is no single Baptist theology or practice of baptism, only theologies and practices, and this diversity accords with Baptist ecclesiology which continues to tend towards independency.[106]

Nonetheless, there are a number of sources which describe the Baptist practice of initiation. In the liturgical book, *Praise God*, "five essential elements in the whole process of initiation" are outlined. These are: "the reading of scripture and the reasons for engaging in Christian initiation; profession of faith and commitment; prayers; baptism in the name of the Trinity, possibly with the laying on of hands; and reception into membership and admission to communion."[107] Similarly, *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship: A guidebook for worship leaders* (1991), identifies several stages of or aspects to initiation: "Believers' baptism, reception into membership at the Lord's Supper, and the laying on of hands, all relate to our *one initiation* into the Body of Christ."[108] This suggests that Baptists believe that initiation is a process, with baptism as one element. However, this would be to oversimplify. One of the main ecumenical differences between Baptists and other churches is that Baptists hold that only those who confess faith in Jesus Christ should be baptized,

[103] Bradshaw, "Baptism in the Anglican Communion," 59.
[104] Anthony R. Cross, "Baptism and the Baptists: Theology and Practice in Twentieth-Century Britain (Nottingham: Paternoster Press 2000), 319.
[105] Ibid., 320.
[106] Anthony R. Cross, "Baptism and the Baptists: Theology and Practice in Twentieth-Century Britain, 455.
[107] Ibid., 333.
[108] Ibid.

and that it should be done, more often than not, by full immersion. Thus, whilst Roman Catholics and Anglicans maintain that baptism is the beginning of a journey towards faith, for Baptists, faith is often a precondition, and baptism an event that arises from or responds to already existent faith. Consequently, infant baptism is inconceivable for Baptists, and the notion of a "common baptism," recognised by all Christians, is not always helpful. Nonetheless, in a recent article, Paul Fiddes, a leading Baptist theologian, has also recognised the need for a theology of process. "Rather than urging an equivalence of infant baptism with believer-baptism," he suggests that "it might be possible to recognise whole *patterns of initiation* as being equivalent."[109]

Whereas many Baptists prefer the term ordinance to the language of sacrament, Fiddes argues that within the Baptist tradition, "a strong and continuing stream [has] regarded baptism in a sacramental way as an encounter between the faith of the believer and the transforming grace of God."[110] For Baptists, a process is at work between the moment of conversion and baptism, as the prevenient grace of God and the Holy Spirit move together and nurture faith. In consequence, Fiddes contends:

> Placing saving faith before baptism is bound therefore to result in an understanding of "becoming a Christian" as something characterized by process.[111]

It is this interplay between grace and faith, the Spirit and the water, and Christ's body and the church, that Fiddes draws upon in order to build his theology of process. This theory works on the basis that baptism as a process and initiation as a process are two different strands of the same idea:

> the full sense of a "sacramental process of initiation" should not be lost in a "baptismal process" understood as "life-long growth in Christ … if we are to speak of a process of initiation in which baptism may stand either near the beginning (infant baptism) or near the end (believer's baptism), we need constructively to develop a *theology of initiatory process.*[112]

Consequently, Fiddes suggests,

> there may be more potential in exploring a wider context of commonality – not simply an appeal to a common *event* of initiation (baptism), but rather to a common *process*, or pattern, of initiation in which the moment of baptism plays a part.[113]

[109] Fiddes, "The baptism of believers" 78.
[110] Paul S. Fiddes, "Baptism and the Process of Christian Initiation," 49.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Paul S. Fiddes, 'Baptism and the Process of Christian Initiation, 58.
[113] Ibid., 48.

Therefore, whilst Fiddes seems to agree with the idea proposed by Avis that baptism is complete in itself, but not the totality of initiation,[114] his concept of initiation is closely bound up with his understanding of salvation. Christopher Ellis, also a Baptist theologian, agrees, arguing that the prior reality of faith

> Can encourage us to view salvation as a process within which baptism plays a significant part. Baptism may be seen as a medium of the Spirit who has already impinged on the person and led him or her to a confession of faith and a life of discipleship.[115]

From this angle, Baptism as initiation into a process is about Christian discipleship and life-long growth, as the individual dies and rises with Christ, and initiation as a process is not only sacramental, but also, and more importantly, soteriological.

This reflects the section in BEM related to baptism and faith, which affirms that "Baptism is related not only to momentary experience, but to life-long growth in Christ."[116] This idea was welcomed by the different church traditions. By viewing initiation through this lens, baptism becomes less about the "When?" – (Infant or adult believer?) – and more about the "Why?" Underlying Fiddes' plea that we should "abandon the stereotypes that infant baptism only expresses divine grace, and that believer's baptism only witnesses to human faith,"[117] there is a suggestion that the "*nature* of grace and faith will be different at different stages of the journey," or "different phases of Christian nurture."[118] The process of initiation, for Fiddes, is closely related to the believers' relationship with God and participation in the body, because "the process of Christian growth," is about "being drawn more deeply into the triune life of God."[119] Ultimately, then, "the 'baptismal process' of life is also a journey of salvation."[120] This journey, according to Fiddes, is Christian initiation; it is all about "becoming a disciple, about responding to the call to be a disciple and taking up the responsibilities of a disciple: faith must become an *ethical* response before the beginning has come to an end."[121] As such,

> Baptism, at whatever age, could be seen as only part of a journey of Christian beginnings, a journey with its starting point in a prevenient grace of God and its

[114] Ibid., 50.
[115] Christopher Ellis, "Baptism and Sacramental Freedom," in Paul S. Fiddes (ed.), *Reflections on the Water. Understanding God and the World through the Baptism of Believers* (Oxford: Regent's Park College 1996), 31.
[116] World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 4.
[117] Ibid., 58.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 61.
[120] Ibid., 59.
[121] Ibid.

> ending with an "owned" faith of a Christian disciple, a believer saying "yes" to God's "yes" to him or her and being commissioned for ministry in the world.[122]

For Fiddes, initiation into the church, the Body of Christ, would appear to be a life-long process. Given the nature of salvation, however, this journey will not find its completion or fulfilment this side of eternity. From that eschatological perspective, Forrester, writing from a Church of Scotland perspective, is correct to affirm that "ultimate salvation will depend on the believer's continued obedience to God's will," because "for a Christian there is no final salvation apart from the eschatological Body and its purpose."[123] In the end, therefore, what matters more than whether or not baptism is complete sacramental initiation, is instead "the final result of the whole initiatory process: a Spirit-filled life in a Spirit-filled community consecrated to God's purpose."[124]

These explorations of some of the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Baptist perspectives on sacramental initiation help to demonstrate the influence that international ecumenical discussions were having on the Church of Scotland in this period. This resulted in a move away from the work of the Special Commission. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the Church of Scotland's Panel on Doctrine was offering a fresh appraisal of the doctrine of baptism. Much of this was driven by the result of the findings of the Working Party on Baptism, which was comprised of members of the Panel on Doctrine and representatives from the Mission and Evangelism Resources Committee (MERC) of the Board of National Mission. These members, having "revisited the reports of the Special Commission," and studied "the positions of continental theologians writing from a Reformed perspective, and several contemporary ecumenical documents[125] as well as recent developments in other churches," concluded that "a consensus which had obtained in the Church from the sixteenth century onwards was now increasingly being questioned."[126] They observed that in practice, across Scotland, infant baptism was being challenged as the theological norm, and the Panel deemed it pertinent for a "contemporary statement" of the doctrine of baptism to be considered.[127] The Panel on Doctrine suggested that there were many reasons for the "low profile of baptism" in the life of the church.[128] These included

[122] Fiddes, "The baptism of believers" 79.
[123] Forrester, *Encounter with God*, 95.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Documents include The Catholic *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (1972), *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), *On the Way: Towards an Integrated Approach to Christian* Initiation (1995), Becoming *a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of our Common Baptism* (1997) and *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition of Christian Initiation* (2001).
[126] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 1.2.2, 13/2.
[127] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 1.2.7, 13/3.
[128] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 1.3.1.4, 13/3.

ecumenical agreement regarding the validity of baptism administered in the name of the Trinity,[129] the limited impact of charismatic or renewal movements on the experience of baptism in the Church of Scotland,[130] the reality that, as the Panel observed, "no leading Scottish theologian joined the significant twentieth-century Reformed theologians – Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and Jürgen Moltmann – in rejecting infant baptism,"[131] and the subsequent presentation of a "maximalist case for infant baptism" by the Special Commission on Baptism, which had "made no provision at all for baptism on personal profession of faith.[132] The Panel also proposed that variances in principles and practice among ministers in administering baptism had resulted in "an unquestioning liberality of administration," with the result that "the Scottish population include[d] a huge number of individuals, well in excess of the current membership of the Kirk, who received its baptism as infants but are now otherwise totally out-with the church."[133] The Panel suggested that there was an argument expressed by some that infant baptism could be perceived as ineffective, given the disparity between the number of people baptised and the membership of the Kirk, which consequently rendered baptism insignificant.[134] Despite this, the Panel highlighted the connection between God's nature and infant baptism, maintaining the "conviction that baptism as a sign of God's love must not be denied to any who sincerely seek it for their children."[135]

Notwithstanding the fact that the context and the importance of baptism in the Church of Scotland at the beginning of the twenty-first century was markedly different from that of the period of the early church, the Panel emphasised that the Reformed tradition had "always recognised baptism as an essential mark of the church."[136] It rooted baptism's meaning in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ[137] and, acknowledging the "Word of God in Scripture as the rule of the Church's faith and practice," it also affirmed that "the New Testament's presentation of baptism must always engage [our] serious attention."[138] To that end, in light of the "historical caution about the prevalence of infant baptism in the early church," it highlighted believers' baptism and the implication of

[129] Ibid.
[130] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 1.3.1.5, 13/4.
[131] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 1.3.1.6, 13/4.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 1.3.1.8, 13/4.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 1.3.1.3, 13/3.
[137] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, Appendix A, 13/8.
[138] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 1.3.1.3, 13/3.

baptising faith-professing adults.[139] At the same time, it observed that the significance of the sacrament of baptism as a rite and component in the process of Christian initiation post *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, had begun to emphasise "lifelong discipleship within a journey to as well as from faith."[140]

Thus, whilst the Panel on Doctrine believed that the church "must face the truth that, for large sections of the Scottish population, the celebration of baptism has ceased to have the meaning and significant that it had for previous generations," it nevertheless hoped that "the honest recognition of this truth within the Church of Scotland may yet lead towards the renewal of our understanding of baptism and the recovery of elements within that tradition which have been neglected or overlooked."[141] The Report proceeded to affirm that "the primary image of baptism in the New Testament is that of a person being baptised upon personal profession of faith," and that this image is "complemented by the image of baptism of the household upon corporate profession of faith." As such, the Panel acknowledged the need expressed from the wider church to give

> renewed attention first to preparation for Baptism, as well as, secondly, to the need to ensure that the communities into which the baptised are received are such that opportunities for spiritual growth and development in Christian discipleship are present.[142]

In light of the context of the contemporary statement of the Church of Scotland, as well as consideration of national and international developments, there was a sense that "there was a need … for a contemporary statement of the doctrine of baptism."[143] Evidently, the distance between doctrine and practice had widened. Moreover, in the Church of Scotland's response to the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,* there had been an acceptance that baptism was part of a life-long journey of discipleship that needed pre- and post-baptismal nurture, and some suggestion that, in the shifting context, infant baptism was perhaps no longer the norm. The 2003 report went as far as questioning the sacrament's significance, in light of many New Testament passages that in its view did not support infant baptism, stating that "the outcome, in a Church with a pervasively biblical ethos, has been a soft-pedalling or tentativeness about the meaning of the sacrament."[144] Thus, whilst not rejecting infant baptism, the Church of Scotland was challenging it, not only on Biblical grounds, but in recognition that contextually, in a post-Christendom society, there

[139] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 1.3.2.2, 13/5.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 1.5.2, 13/7.
[142] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 13/1.
[143] Ibid., 13/3.
[144] Ibid., 13/4.

is an increasing likelihood that numbers of adults requesting baptism are likely to increase, whilst the number of infants being baptised will decline. With mission high on the ecclesiastical agenda, the meaning of baptism and the response of adult believers now took on a far greater significance, leading the panel to suggest that this is the "most critical baptismal challenge before the Church of Scotland today."[145]

In response to this, the Panel on Doctrine took several steps. It proposed an Act that made it possible for another family member to act in place of a consenting parent; it drafted provision for baptism of people with learning difficulties;[146] and it also recommended the creation of a flexible response to the changing landscape in the form of a service of Thanksgiving and Blessing after the birth of a child, a step which was in stark contrast to the earlier decision in 1983, and would certainly have been rejected by the Special Commission. In 2006 this provision was published in the form of four liturgies in *A Welcome to a Child*, which were intended to offer an alternative to the baptism of infants and to meet the pastoral needs of those parents and guardians who were unable to commit to the baptismal promises for their children. The preface to this provision argued that this provision was being made in the recognition that

> there was a greater fluidity of view today about the most appropriate time in a person's life for baptism, and that many Christian parents sought a rite of reception of their child into the family of the Church which would leave the child free upon reaching maturity to decide from him/herself to seek baptism.[147]

It thus acknowledged, for the first time in the Church of Scotland, the need to provide a rite of passage that would be an alternative to infant baptism, offering both pastoral care to families who could not make the required commitment and safeguarding ministerial conscience in light of the necessity that baptised children must be raised in the faith. At the same time, the instructions regarding the use of the orders reiterates that there can be "no alternative to baptism" and that it alone "remains the point of entry into membership of the Church."[148] The reason given for this in the 2003 report is

> to safeguard the integrity of Christian baptism as 'a seal upon the gift of grace and the response of faith', signifying 'the action and love of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit' … In echo of the clarion call of the mid twentieth century, 'Let the church be the church!, we argue in turn: 'Let baptism be baptism!'[149]

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[145] Ibid., 13/6.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Church of Scotland, *A Welcome to a Child: Four Orders for Thanksgiving and Blessing* (Edinburgh: St Andrew's Press 2006), iv.
[148] Church of Scotland, *A Welcome to a Child*, 2006, vi.
[149] Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly, 2003, 13/7.

This was a definitive moment in the life of baptismal theology in the Church of Scotland. The 2003 report acknowledged the importance of faith and personal response, elements that the Special Commission had certainly emphasised, but which it had given different weight. For the first time, it declared that infant baptism was no longer the norm, but that believers' baptism was. Nonetheless, this introduction of a service of thanksgiving and blessing, whilst pastorally expedient, was in no way meant to detract from the meaning of baptism, which the Panel believed required the profession of faith, either of an individual or of a community:

> Christian Baptism signifies the event whereby the gracious love of God towards us, embodied in the action of Jesus Christ, is met by the response of faith. The response of faith is itself the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8), and signifies the beginning of our life within the community of the church of Jesus Christ. It is a response to the spiritual transformation that Christ has accomplished on our behalf, and it offers to us the possibility of an ethical transformation within the wider community of the church, and within the community of creation. As such, we are called to the celebration of baptism in all its richness and fullness, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.[150]

Whilst sharing the same Christocentric understanding of baptism as the Special Commission, the doctrine of baptism presented in the 2003 report suggested that baptism is only a beginning, and placed a stronger emphasis upon the process of spiritual transformation. There appears to be recognition that baptism has both personal and communal benefits and responsibility, not least in regard to discipleship. This, once again, led to further discussion regarding baptism, ecclesiology and church membership.

In 2004, the Panel on Doctrine, in consultation with the Board of Practice and Procedure, a conversation emerged regarding the "nature of church membership," which attempted to clarify "the categories of persons who should be reckoned as being within the life of the Church."[151] Using census and other statistical data, the report highlighted that "allegiance to the Church of Scotland [was] considerably higher than those claiming membership,"[152] with the 2001 Census revealing that almost 2,000,000 people living in Scotland claimed the Church of Scotland as their "current religion."[153] Despite this, there can be no denying that church membership has declined. The Panel sought to account for the decline in Church membership, pointing towards "mobility and fragmentation," the "breakdown of denominational allegiance," the preference felt by many people to remain "adherents," and

[150] Ibid., 13/15.
[151] Report of the Panel on Doctrine, 2004, 12/1.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.

the search for meaning "outwith any religion."[154] They noted too that all these factors "challenge traditional understandings of membership," to the extent that many people had begun to suggest that "the concept be abandoned."[155] Instead, a focus upon commitment[156] and Christian discipleship,[157] rather than church membership, had been suggested. At the same time, however, the Panel pointed out the distinctive nature of the church's understanding of membership, highlighting its association with baptism:

> "membership" in the church is a different kind of concept from that which defines who is one of the in crowd and who is an outsider. It is a concept which does not have a counterpart in "secular" parlance, but finds its meaning in the unique event known as baptism.[158]

Consequently, the Panel maintained, "baptism and membership cannot be separated."[159]

Drawing on the commentary on Christian Baptism, prepared by the Panel on Worship and first published in 2001, the Panel on Doctrine's report reiterated that baptism is a welcoming into the membership of the church after which "the baptised person belongs now in a new community, joined not just to Christ, but to the Church, which is called 'Christ's body'."[160] The distinct nature of this new community is rooted in the importance of all members coming together as one, in order to "experience fully at first hand all that Christ wrought and all that God did in him." Indeed, they "are kept in union with Christ by the reality of [their] being together in the Church."[161] Despite the concerns raised by the sociologists, the Panel thus maintained that the concept of membership is a useful one, so long as it is clear that according to the New Testament, membership in the Church is "quite a different matter from a list of those belonging to any human society or grouping."[162]

At the very heart of this difference lies the acknowledgement that to be baptised is to identify with Jesus Christ and become part of his body. The word "member" means "part of a body,"[163] and within that reality an invitation is extended, which is a commission, "to share both in his [Christ's] *kerygma* and *diakonia*, his authoritative declaration of the Father's love, and his humble, submissive service."[164] This echoes a much earlier report in

[154] Report of the Panel on Doctrine, 2004, 12/4.
[155] Ibid., 12/5.
[156] Report to the General Assembly 1999 by the Board of National Mission, 20/87, 11.9.1.6.
[157] Report to the General Assembly 2001 by the Special Commission, 'Church Without Walls,' 12.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Report to the General Assembly 1975 by the Committee of Forty, 522.
[164] Report to the General Assembly 1985 by the Panel on Doctrine, 150.

the 1970s, where this "proclamation and service" was described as "the *raison d etre* of the whole community, the freedom and duty of every baptised member,"[165] highlighting the Christian engagement expected of and from each of the baptised. In professing faith, the baptised were believed to be giving assent to the calling "inherent in their Baptism,"[166] for although the latter was not considered to be a guarantee of faithfulness, it was recognised as "the sign and seal of our [the baptised] calling."[167] That calling was connected with the baptised new identity found through the waters of baptism, which affirmed their belonging to God, their new life in Christ, and pointed towards the belief that baptism initiates individuals into a community of people who all have a ministry.

In 2001, the Panel on Worship's report and commentary reflected the view, shared by many Christian traditions, that through the waters of baptism an individual becomes a child of God, belongs to a particular community with a story, and is a member of the church universal. "In Christ" the baptised are united with God and each other, resulting in an erasure of the labels and markers given by the world:

> As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3.27).

This is presumably what the Panel meant when they affirmed that "membership" in the church "is a different kind of concept from that which defines who is one of the in crowd and who is an outsider."[168] For the Mission and Discipleship Council this distinctiveness was related to the church's identity, evident in the statement:

> The great requirement here on the people of God is to be what they are: to live out their identity in society, not least in the ethical distinctiveness such identity entails.[169]

The 2004 report went as far to emphasise some of the benefits of a "leaner membership," and to highlight the positive aspect of the growing commitment of church members.[170] This might be seen as an unfair assessment of those who may, in their living, be just as committed a church members, but for various reasons decide to remain adherents or "associates." On the other hand, the value of commitment cannot be underestimated, particularly when it focuses attention upon the nature and function of the church, as the body of Christ, inviting both inward and outward reflection.

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[165] Ibid., 151-152.
[166] Report to the General Assembly 1977 by the Special Committee anent Church Membership, 461.
[167] Report to the General Assembly 1987 by the Mission Committee, 131.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Report to the General Assembly 2007 by the Mission and Discipleship Council, 4/4, 1.4.
[170] Report of the Panel on Doctrine, 2004, 12/13.

This was to find expression in *By Water and the Spirit: A commentary on the services of baptism and confirmation,* published in 2006 the Church of Scotland. Here it is affirmed that the sacrament of baptism has been instituted by Christ,[171] and is "an event of joy, excitement and celebration rather than simply a 'rite of passage'."[172] Grace is a component of baptism: through "ordinary material things … the grace of God is conveyed."[173] Whether of an adult or child, baptism "proclaims and conveys the grace of God."[174] Like other Reformed approaches, not least Calvin, *By Water and the Spirit* makes much of the work of the Spirit, which is not only "active in the rite of baptism," but also "work[s] towards the spiritual regeneration of the baptised person."[175] *By Water and the Spirit* stresses that this is not intended to "suggest a 'mechanical' connection between the act of baptism and the arrival of the Holy Spirit;" rather it "marks the giving of the Spirit in a particularly significant way," that allows the life of the Spirit to flow through the Church and "catches up individuals and sweeps them into the Church and along Christ's way."[176] Therefore, whilst *By Water and the Spirit* argues that baptism is not strictly efficacious in that "sacraments do not make something true – that has already happened,"[177] it does consider baptism to be a journey and the work of God, and in that sense, through the Spirit, efficacious. Baptism is seen as a "process, rather than a one-off event,"[178] and it is affirmed that "baptism is the beginning of a journey, a journey measured not in miles or years but in a deepening ability to love God and neighbour."[179] *By Water and the Spirit* argues that "baptism itself is not a Christian upbringing any more than school enrolment is education; there must be continuing nurture."[180] To that end, "baptism is a journey of growing 'into Christ'," which can begin at any age, because "learning about life, learning how to trust and to love, the developing of gifts and talents: that is for all ages."[181] Further, *By Water and the Spirit* suggests that the church itself is "baptised *into* faith," where faith involves

> Putting our lives in other (God's) hands, trusting God to turn us round towards ways that enrich life and express God's love – in terms of new knowledge and insight, of our feelings and emotions, of our ethical behaviour.[182]

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[171] Church of Scotland, *By Water and the Spirit: A Commentary of the Services of Baptism and Confirmation* (Edinburgh: St Andrew's Press 2006), 3.
[172] Ibid., 5.
[173] Ibid., 7.
[174] Ibid., 9.
[175] Ibid., 13.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid., 3.
[178] Ibid., 19.
[179] Ibid., 5.
[180] Ibid.,19.
[181] Ibid., 9.
[182] Ibid., 11.

It is in this context that the meaning of Confirmation is addressed. *By Water and the Spirit* recognises that in the early church, "the whole ceremony of Christian initiation took place on the one occasion," but that much later "the laying on of hands by the bishop which sealed the relationship of the new Christian to the Church became separated."[183] Nevertheless, *By Water and the Spirit* holds that confirmation was still deemed to be part of baptism, until, in the course of medieval developments in the theology of the sacraments, the church "gave additional meaning" to it, making it not only "a Spirit-led completing of a person's baptism," but the mark of "entry into full participation in the councils of the Church."[184] As *By Water and the Spirit* observes, this contrasts with the current position of the Church of Scotland, where "it is now usually acknowledged that baptism is itself 'complete' as into membership of the church;" as a result "baptised children are welcomed to Communion," until they reach a stage whereby, upon a confession of faith, they will "be confirmed in the regular way." [185] In order to avoid the notion that "confirmation is a 'final' step and that no more growth is expected thereafter," the commentary highlights that some people "prefer to see this event as … the 'first public affirmation' of baptism," and the occasion through which "a baptised person is given a responsible role in the local Church as well as in the mission of the Church in the world."[186]

Thus, *By Water and the Spirit* positively suggested that baptism is a process, marking the beginning of a journey, and not a one-off event. This stands in contrast to the conclusions of the Special Commission on Baptism, who had previously highlighted the manner in which baptism in the patristic era had been reduced to "only the initiation of a sacramental process," which had "to be supplemented by other sacramental means of grace."[187] Keen to stress the completeness of baptism and the sacrament's vital link with soteriology, which ensured that grace could not be considered apart from Christ, the Special Commission had been critical of the Augustinian tradition and the ecclesiological model that emerged. The link between baptism and salvation is certainly upheld in *By Water and the Spirit* but, unlike the Special Commission, the 2006 report suggests that baptism does indeed convey and confer sacramental grace. Further, it explicitly names on the importance of nurture and growth, both before and after baptism, and the importance of the calling of the baptised to the world.

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[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ch.1, 21, Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, May 1956, 612.

From the above it is evident that the understanding of baptism that emerged post-1963 both had much in common with the work of the Special Commission and departed radically from its findings. The Christocentric nature of baptism, with Christ's death and resurrection central, was upheld. The importance of the New Testament and catechetical instruction remained and the necessity of a community of faith for the baptised to belong to was paramount. However, key differences were to emerge that have resulted in a rather different baptismal understanding today. Part of this is a consequence of the changing social context in which the church finds itself in, as well as the influence of international ecumenical discussions to which the Church of Scotland has listened and of which it has been a part of. And yet, the watershed in baptismal theology since 1963 was centred on the question of Act XVII 1963 and its administration. For some, the Act was too strict; for others it was too lenient, and for others it failed completely to offer an adequate picture to fit the pastoral reality. As the final third of the twentieth century unfolded, it became increasingly clear that Act XVII was unable to address the issues raised by the increasing turn to believers' baptism and that this was unhelpful when considering the nature of initiation as a process. In recent decades, this has resulted in a radical shift as the Church of Scotland has come to affirm that believers' baptism is the norm and infant baptism complementary. This change in baptismal understanding centred on the fundamental meaning of baptism and on the understanding of its guiding principle: grace or faith?

Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis it was acknowledged that the Special Commission was appointed to carry out a fresh examination of the doctrine of baptism and lead the church to theological agreement and uniform practice. There is no question that the Commission's work was thorough, in depth and that their commitment to the work commended. However, it has been demonstrated that their task was a difficult one. Part of this was the consequence of varying understandings regarding the sacrament of baptism, which had prompted the appointment of the Commission in the first place, with some believing that administration was too restrictive, and others too lenient. Yet, it is also apparent that some of this difficulty was a consequence of the Commission's lengthy reports, lack of clarity and departure from the Reformed tradition.

There is no doubt that the reports substantially agree with and are rooted in the Reformed tradition. For instance, the importance of the New Testament and the primacy of God's activity within the sacrament of baptism, which resulted in a strong link between baptism and soteriology is evident. They maintain that baptism is an event of God, grace cannot be separated from Jesus, and the corporate element of baptism is emphasized, with the Special Commission affirming the objective nature of the sacrament. They acknowledge the importance of faith, the significance of the worshipping community for the administration of baptism, and recognize the covenantal understanding of the sacrament as justification for infant baptism. However, owing to the influence of the Convener, the Special Commission muddied the waters and offered a very different trajectory by suggesting that *baptisma* was closely aligned to Christ's vicarious death, and that the sanctifying nature of the incarnation was the primary justification for the baptism of infants. This created a tension between two very different paradigms, one that led to discriminate baptism and another, that could have led to indiscriminate baptism. The result was a doctrine of baptism that reinforced the passive, objective, complete nature of the sacrament and negated the importance of an ethical outworking of baptism through response, growth and discipleship. The result was confusion in the General Assembly, and whilst they accepted the doctrine as a valid statement, it failed to be passed in law.

The years that followed the work of the Special Commission demonstrated that they had failed to bring about uniformity of doctrine and practice, as Act XVII 1963 was revisited on a number of occasions. Whilst the Commission's influence can be seen in the resistance in the late 20th century to the church providing an alternative to infant baptism, change was

in the air. As a consequence of ongoing ecumenical discussions, not least the influence of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, internal debates about the nature of baptism, membership and mission, and awareness of the changing Scottish context, the Church of Scotland reformed its baptismal theology and practice. Drawing upon the New Testament, the church recognised that the primary image of baptism was upon profession of faith, which challenged infant baptism as the theological norm. Consequently, the Church of Scotland changed its position and, for the first time, affirmed that adult baptism, upon a profession of faith, would be the accepted practice. Infant baptism was now complementary and in recognition of the fluidity of views regarding when the best time for an individual to be baptized was, services for thanksgiving and blessing of a child was introduced. Not only did this provide an alternative starting place for people who were not ready to make baptismal vows, but it also recognised that for some people, the place of faith and choice was important. Indeed, the significance of baptism as a rite in the process of Christian initiation was accepted, and baptism was considered to be a beginning and part of a bigger journey. The soteriological and Christocentric nature of baptism was still affirmed, but within this understanding there was an acknowledgement that baptism is neither grace nor faith, but both. To that end the importance of pre- and post-baptismal formation and nurture were reckoned to be important and the ethical distinctiveness of the baptized important, as they seek to live out their calling.

Since 1963 the Church of Scotland's understanding of baptism has shifted, making provision for adult baptism upon a profession of faith primary and Act 2003 made the practice of administering baptism as wide and inclusive as possible, whilst remaining within a covenantal framework. What has not changed is the Christocentric nature of baptism and the belief that it is the affirming sign of love that already knows and claims. The seal of a promise that has already been fulfilled and the mark that invites the baptized to grow more and more into the likeness of the God who made them, living transformed lives in the world, between-the-times.

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