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Becoming Christian:
Redeeming the Secular through the *Ordo* of Baptism

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Abstract

This thesis presents an argument for the development of a catechumenate for the Church of Scotland. It does so first by drawing attention to the wide discrepancy between the assumptions of the secular culture and those of the church, specifically the Church of Scotland, with a view to understanding the substantial differences in the beliefs of those baptised and the beliefs of the church. It argues that the church has yet to come to terms with this discrepancy and consequently has weakened its distinctive baptismal witness. Secondly, the thesis considers in depth the development and reception of two major studies on the subject of baptism conducted by the Church of Scotland in the last sixty years. It indicates that both remain largely unknown quantities within the church and have subsequently failed to provide practical guidance to the church in its practice of baptism. This thesis considers the experience and practice of adult baptism in contemporary Scotland and concludes with an extended argument justifying the need for a fully developed catechumenate.

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A PhD is a singular journey that must be taken alone. No one else will do the research or the writing for you, no one else can start or finish the project on your behalf or persevere for the duration. It is a singular journey but one that would be impossible without a constellation of people to help and guide you along the way, so at the completion of this work I'd like to recognise and thank a number of people for their contributions. Foremost among them is my advisor, the Rev Dr Doug Gay who listened patiently from day one, encouraged me with praise for my early submissions and critiqued my work at the highest levels of scholarship. Joining Doug for the last phase of the journey was Dr Scott Spurlock who provided a helpful synergy alongside Doug and provided many unique and constructive comments at the writing stage of this work. Dr Heather Walton is to be credited for sharing in the development of the DPT program and for moving me and my cohorts through the preliminary stages of the process. Her lessons and writing on Reflective Practice were particularly enlightening. Dr Leah Robinson's administrative assistance was invaluable and a great encouragement. I am also grateful to my cohorts Anna Sorenson and Ian Stirling who have gone the distance as fellow doctoral candidates and whose friendship remains valuable to me.

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Introduction

I began this doctoral study five years ago in the face of a pastoral crisis: I was approached by a woman who asked me about baptism. Her husband was a member of the church and attended regularly with the family's two children, but his wife, Dr McNeil, was more reticent about participating. In time and with some pastoral encouragement she became curious about the church and began attending on occasion. Prior to her request for baptism she had no church connection and only fragmentary knowledge of the Gospel story. She wasn't seeking baptism because of family or peer pressure. She'd simply had an experience and had come to a realisation. She said to me:

I've been coming to church for a couple of weeks...I wanted to come along and sample what was going on, and I can remember clearly, driving in the car...and just something hit me, and I know that probably sounds cliché, but I just was hit by this, knowledge that this...oh, uh, it's real, and it was just in that instant, because prior to that I was very sceptical, I was very, not I would say that I was unbelieving, but there was something that just hit me that said, this is real.

Writing about the desire for baptism, Barth reflected that:

The mystery and miracle of this event are always great enough to raise the astonished question how it comes into being, how it is possible, in short, where, whence and how it may begin (1981, 3).

My surprise at Dr McNeil's request was no less so and it left me asking myself with some anxious trepidation "What do I do with this person?" It wasn't the first time I baptised an adult, but it was the first time in which I was properly struck by the awesome responsibility of introducing someone to the faith, and my tools for doing so seemed woefully inadequate. We met several times over the ensuing weeks and she patiently attended my six-week new members course, but I felt my approach was a bit paltry, awkward, even shambolic. Eventually I did baptise her, but not without some reservations. Dr McNeil was troubled by the miraculous stories of the Bible and had doubts about the bodily resurrection of Jesus. In consequence, she could not fully affirm her faith as expressed in the Apostle's Creed. I wasn't convinced that she really understood what baptism signified,

nor what it meant to profess faith in Christ. Additionally, I was concerned she would find it difficult to engage in the life of an aging and traditional congregation comprised largely of natal Christians who were born in the faith and would not understand the excitement of her mid-life conversion. In the end, I baptised her and it was a holy and joyful moment for both of us. Dr McNeil was faithful in her church attendance for some many months, but gradually drifted away from congregational life and now no longer attends, following a pattern of disengagement I have seen with other adult baptisms. Not for the first time I was left wondering what I might have done differently to enable a more effective initiation into Christianity and the life of the church: hence this study. I wondered how widely this concern was felt and was encouraged to find in my research that I was not alone.

Over the last sixty years the Church of Scotland has devoted a great deal of attention to the question of baptism and in the last half of the 20th century produced two new expressions of the doctrine of baptism. The first was developed by the Special Commission on Baptism (1952-1963), and the second by the Panel on Doctrine (1999-2003). Both Reports were intended to address the problem of divergent baptismal practice and belief across the Church of Scotland and both substantively addressed the sacrament and its role in congregational life. In content however, they are very different from one another. The Report of the Special Commission commends the baptism of infants, while the Report of the Panel on Doctrine urges the church to recover the New Testament witness of baptism upon profession of faith and household baptism. In this respect, the Reports stand in contradistinction to one another, but they are both alike in this: they are largely unknown to the church and in consequence have failed to unify baptismal practice. In this thesis, I will first argue that this is the result of an absence of teaching materials suitable for use with the baptism of adult believers.

More significantly, I will argue that the Church of Scotland has failed to revise its baptismal practice in accordance with rapid and profound cultural changes in modern Scotland. Where once the church may have been able to assume a modicum of shared understanding with the culture as to the meaning of the sacrament of baptism, that agreement is now suspect and those coming for baptism may hold ideas that are quite antithetical to those espoused by the church. My contention is that this represents a significant problem to the church. Baptism signifies one's entry into the faith of Jesus Christ and into membership in His church, a commitment of the highest import. It is the responsibility of the church to ensure that a baptised individual understands this initiation

and the commitments of faith made in baptism. Additionally, the church must provide every opportunity for the baptised to grow and flourish in their faith under the auspices of the believing community. Of course, this is no truer today than it was yesterday, but where the church could once assume its values and beliefs were paralleled and encouraged by a Christendom culture it can do so no longer. The culture of modern Scotland is now thoroughly secular and largely indifferent to the claims of Christianity and, by default, the church has become a marginal community. Choosing to enter such a community via baptism is and ought to be a moment of profound significance for an individual and one attended by the church with utmost seriousness and deep joy. The challenge to the church is to provide a more substantive social context to baptism that encourages not only doctrinal instruction but intentional inculturation into a believing community. That is, the newly baptised must be *helped* to become Christian not only through baptism but through an ongoing life of faith in which the pathway from secular unbelief to lifelong Christian discipleship is clearly marked. Enabling a baptised individual to move from a life of unbelief to one of belief is no simple matter and teaching the doctrine of baptism of the Church of Scotland is only a beginning. In this thesis, I will argue that what is called for in the Church of Scotland is a fully developed catechumenate modelled on the Roman Catholic Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

I will lay out my argument in five chapters. In Chapter One I will discuss the changing social function of baptism in light of the secular culture of Scotland and explain why the church and the contemporary society are so strange to one another.

In Chapters Two and Three I will consider the work of the Church of Scotland over the last sixty years in developing contemporary statements of the doctrine of baptism. I will do so in Chapter Two by reviewing two recent Ph.D. theses written by scholars who have researched the work of the Special Commission on Baptism and its Convener, Professor T.F. Torrance. In Chapter Three I will review the development of the 2003 Panel on Doctrine Report in the context of an interview I conducted with its convener, the Rev Dr John McPake.

In Chapter Four I will look at the experience and practice of adult baptism in Scotland today by sharing the results of a number of interviews I conducted with recently baptised adults and the ministers who baptised them with a view to discerning trends in current baptismal practice.

In Chapter Five I will review the preceding work and draw conclusions about the use of doctrine in the Church of Scotland as a means for preparing and nurturing individuals in baptism. I will conclude with recommendations for the development of a catechumenate in the Church of Scotland.

Finally, a word about language. Throughout this thesis I will use the term “adult baptism” in contradistinction to “infant baptism.” By adult baptism I mean children, young people and adults who seek baptism of their own accord rather than receiving the sacrament as infants. I have avoided the more descriptive phrase favoured by the 2003 Panel on Doctrine: “baptism upon profession of faith” for the simple reason that, as will be seen in Chapter Four, some adults choose baptism for reasons other than professing their faith.

Chapter One

Baptism in Secular Scotland

Christianity has a vast reservoir of resources for shaping life and death...and works not only with abstract concepts but with vivid stories, striking images, resonant symbols, and life-shaping rituals. It appeals to the heart and senses as well as mind, and offers a range of prompts and provocations for guiding and shaping the lives of individuals and societies (Woodhead, 2014, 1).

In these few introductory words, Linda Woodhead expresses a classic Durkheimian definition of religion (Durkheim, 1976, 416). Religion *does* something, it functions. It *guides and shapes* the way that life and death are understood, not only in the lives of individuals, but in whole societies. It is creative and constitutive of life together. It does so with an array of intellectual, emotive and sensory tools that can affect every aspect of life. Durkheim felt this way about religion generally, but Woodhead makes these claims about Christianity in particular. There are, of course, other religions that can and do function in the same way, but her interest is in making sense of Christianity and how it has functioned to guide and shape Western culture, specifically European and British culture. But, in the latter half of the 20th century, and now well into the 21st, Christianity appears to have lost a great deal of its functional effect. One might argue that it remains an influential feature in the lives of many *individuals*, but few today are willing to argue that it holds the same influence in *society*. Even for individuals, retaining their Christian faith and practice is increasingly difficult. They may remain faithful but often do so without the support or participation they once had from neighbours and families (Taylor, 2007, 3). Many of Christianity's former adherents no longer subscribe to the ritual patterns of life and death that have long shaped and guided the social world of Britain. It raises the question of whether it can be claimed that Christianity can still guide and shape the lives of individuals and societies as it once did. It may still function in a Durkheimian sense but it does so in a very different way that is not yet clear. Some argue that Christianity as it was represented by the formerly ubiquitous presence of the local church is in a state of terminal decline (Brown, 1997, 2009, 2017; Bruce, 2006, 2014; Voas, 2005). Others are more sanguine or perhaps more guarded and argue that while there is no question about the institutional decline of the church, there remains considerable evidence that religion remains a

compelling influence for a sizable portion of the British population and that surveys consistently reveal a broad public interest in things that were formerly subsumed under the banner of Christianity (Davie, 2007; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005). Other scholars argue that the focus on church decline ignores the growing body of evidence that the church in Britain is both changing and growing (Aisthorpe, 2016; Goodhew, 2012).

In this chapter I will consider in more detail on the decline or rather what I consider the transformation of the social function of the Christian religion in Britain and I will do so in light of the theory of secularisation. In discussing the church in Britain and Scotland I will consider a number of religious surveys and the subsequent analysis of religious trends. There is a great deal of research on the subject of religion and much of it is contradictory and confusing (Goodhew, 2012, 4, 10). This is in part due to the fact that religion and religious practices are not easily quantified. As Brown (2006, 8) argues: “Religion is difficult to study because it is a ‘thing’ that has to be studied in terms of its *consequences*...and not the ‘thing’ itself.” Surveys research various aspects of religion, belief and belonging and do so in different areas of the country at different periods of time and amongst populations with different demographics. Results are often mistakenly generalised for the population at large by the reader or by the researcher him/herself. In order to minimise the risk of such confusion I will strive to be clear as to the demography and locale of survey participants.

The purpose of my thesis is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of religious trends but to develop a sense of the way in which religious practice changed in the latter half of the 20th century. In order to develop a context for answering that question for contemporary Scotland I will consider in brief the ways in which the function of baptism has changed over the life of the Christian church moving from the baptism of adult converts in the bible and the early church to the baptism of infants during the years of Christendom to the present day in which there is a growing ecumenical movement back to the baptism of adult converts. My aim is to reflect on how changing socio-cultural contexts influenced changes in the theology and practice of baptism. Obviously, such a study would constitute a thesis in and of itself, so my comments will necessarily be brief. I will therefore limit my historical survey to three points of transition: the early church practice of convert baptism to the baptism of infants at the beginning of Christendom; the reaffirmation of infant baptism in the Reformation; the reconsideration of adult convert baptism in the 20th century. The bulk of this first chapter and the thesis as a whole will be devoted to

illustrating the cultural changes in Britain and Scotland that have prompted the need to reconsider adult convert baptism.

Baptism in the Early Church

“In the first three centuries, Christianity was illegal. Christians were persecuted, and the risk was too great for anyone to become Christian casually” (Smith, 2012, 61). For modern Britons it is difficult to conceive of such a culture. That Christians were harassed, tortured or put to death for their faith in Jesus Christ seems incredible to the contemporary Western believer but it was in such a hostile culture that the Christian church began and eventually flourished. Converting to Christianity was a choice that could and did have devastating consequences in the lives of many so the church developed an elaborate process to encourage and enable effective and lasting change in the lives of its members, a process that could take three to five years prior one’s baptism. The years prior to baptism served as a period of inculturation and was intended to familiarise the catechumens with the church community through the living witness of their sponsors and catechists, and their entry into the community was staged over time. After being formally recognized as catechumens they were allowed to attend worship with the community but only for the teaching element of the service. Prior to the eucharist the catechumens were excused from the service and the latter sacrament was reserved for them post-baptism. Their gradual inclusion in the believing community allowed them time to slowly expand their circle of intimates while developing the base of loving relationships they would need not only for the catechetical journey but for sustenance in the faith thereafter. They were not entering an unfamiliar community but rather taking their part alongside known individuals who had prayed for them and supported them throughout the long journey. They were joining with trusted friends who provided the communal support and identity needed to flourish in their new lives as Christians, a gift that proved invaluable in the midst of persecution.

Central to the catechumenate was the demand for change (Kreider, 1999, introduction, as cited in Smith, 2012, 63). Growth and maturation in Christian understanding and practice was expected of all those enrolled in the catechumenate and those failing to progress were turned back or delayed in their baptism. There is evidence to suggest that the church also baptised infants *in extremis* (Wright, 1987, 12) but these were exceptions rather than the rule. In the early church “There is no trace of a service designed specifically for infants”

(Wright, 2005, 41). Instead the church responded to the needs of the culture from which it sprang. Initially converts to Christianity came from Judaism and the church was largely a Jewish enterprise. The stories of faith, the Messianic fulfilment of the prophetic witness, the knowledge of the crucifixion and resurrection would have all been familiar to Jews. Additionally, Jews would have been familiar with the rite of baptism, at least in its preliminary forms as a ritual bath and certainly as a washing of repentance as in John's baptism (McGowan, 2012, 136-139). Conversion therefore would have required little in the way of preliminary instruction. However, as the church moved farther into the Gentile and pagan world it encountered an increasing number of individuals who knew nothing of the story of Jesus or the witness of the Jewish scriptures. Additionally, many were enmeshed in pagan ritual and worship that ran counter to the growing body of knowledge unique to Christianity. In consequence extensive teaching was required to make baptism and conversion a sensible experience and models of catechesis developed accordingly. However, as the church grew its missionary focus changed from the conversion of pagans to the care of those who were already within the fold where "the assumed baptismal subject was no longer an adult stranger, a former pagan or Jew, but a child of Christian parents" (Grimes, 2000, 50). This process was accelerated considerably in the year 313 with the Peace of Constantine and the beginning of what became known as Christendom during which the interests of the church were gradually intertwined with the power and aims of the civil authority. After 313 the church and the state increasingly functioned with the same ends and created a new cultural context within which the church learned to function (Smith, 2012, 62). Infant baptism eventually became normative in this new culture and the three to five-year catechumenate gradually fell out of use and finally out of favour altogether as it was accommodated to the needs of the children of nominally Christian parents (Bradshaw, 1996, 20-23). After 313 and particularly after 380 when Christianity became the official state religion conversion was no longer necessary and the church merely had to open its doors to receive as members those who were citizens of the state and therefore Christians by default.

The church may have gained a bounty of previously unknown civil authority, but it arguably lost the heart of its ecclesiastical authority. It could no longer arbitrate standards of behaviour for its members as it had once done nor determine who was eligible and adequately prepared for baptism nor turn away those whose motives for seeking baptism were insincere or inauthentic. The church merely had to welcome all those for whom Christian faith was viewed as a right of birth that required no further qualification (Grimes,

2000, 51). Undoubtedly, there were many genuinely faithful individuals who populated the Christendom church but alongside them were liminal or nominal Christians whom Smith (2012) describes as “christianesque persons whose behaviours do not match the purity and charity of converted life...those accepted in baptism *without having converted their behaviour* (75-76, italics original). Conversion to Christ clearly no longer required the conversion of behaviour or even of belonging as the walls of the church became so porous as to include everyone in the civic community (Kreider, 1999, 90; Wright, 2001, 287-310, as cited in McGowan, 2012, 169). Belief alone remained as a distinguishing feature of the Christian life and those entering the church were simply asked to revise their beliefs as an expression of their membership but as will be seen below belief alone has little to commend it as a sign of genuine faith. *Conversion* to Christianity no longer required any substantive change in a person’s lifestyle and consequently conversion was increasingly disassociated from the act of baptism, infant baptism became more commonplace and eventually supplanted adult baptism as the conventional norm. With few notable exceptions infant baptism then remained the norm for the next 1500 years (Wright, 2001, 308).

Baptism in the Reformation

The Reformation witnessed a revival of catechesis but in a form very different from that of the ancient church. The early church developed the catechumenate as a method of preparing adult converts for baptism but during the Reformation catechesis was directed towards baptised children as a means of preparing them to confirm the baptismal promises made on their behalf in infancy (Old, 1992, 179-200). Instruction focused on the Apostle’s Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments and often took the form of catechetical sermons in which the young people of the community were encouraged, or required to attend. Rather than catechising pagans in the truth of scripture and the ways of the church, catechism during the Reformation was developed for the purpose of enabling baptised young people to make an informed and public confession of faith. Their profession served the dual purpose of joining them not only to the church, but to the wider community as well; it was a confession of faith, but also a declaration of responsible civic affiliation. Catechesis occupied a significant portion of the minister’s time both in the writing of catechisms and in the instruction of the members of his parish (Mason, 2012,

208). Catechesis was not limited to young people but also included the instruction of adults and the intensive process affected the whole community. Old writes:

Within a generation or two this program of catechetical instruction produced a well-informed Christian public. The Reformers largely succeeded in getting the inhabitants of their cities and territories to follow the catechetical instruction they set up (Old, 1992, 199).

Additionally, the need for catechism was set up as a function of baptism and lifelong faith that “entailed a lifelong study of Christian teaching” (ibid.). What is distinctive about catechesis during the Reformation is that it was directed not just to members of the church, but to the whole community. In the pre-Christendom world the church alone provided all the necessary guidance and instruction for the catechumenates. However, during the 16th century Reformers strove to create a Christian society in which Christian nurture would take place not only in the church but in the whole community where young people who were baptised as infants grew up in a culture defined by a Christian ethos. Catechesis was both a direct result of intentional teaching on the part of the parish minister (Mason, 2012, 208) and the indirect result of living in what was intended to be a Christian culture. Instead of *conversion* to Christianity the Reformers had in mind that the baptised would grow up without ever having had the sense of *not* being a Christian. As Schenck wrote:

The principle of the Reformed faith, [is] that the child brought up under Christian influence should never know a time when love to God was not an active principle in its life (1940, 153).

And towards that aim they developed a theology of baptism rooted in the Old Testament Covenant between God and Abraham. A complete discussion of the upheaval and reform of the 16th century church is beyond the scope of this thesis but a review of Calvin’s arguments will suffice for my purposes here. Calvin drew a straight line between the covenant of the Old Testament sealed in circumcision and the covenant of the New Testament sealed in baptism. In his estimation they were one in the same promising the “paternal favor of God, remission of sin and eternal life” (Schenck, 2003, 7). He describes the benefits of baptism in two parts: the forgiveness of sin and spiritual regeneration and argues that just as a child of the covenant in the Old Testament was not denied the benefit of the external sign of blessing in circumcision so the child of the covenant in the New

Testament should not be denied the blessing of baptism (ibid., 7, 10). For Calvin the new life of forgiveness and regeneration lies as a seed in the heart of the baptised infant, waiting to be nurtured into fruition in the form of godly living. From infancy:

The child then opens its eyes redeemed on a world in which by careful nurture it is expected to grow and develop in the Christian ideal of life and character. *The important point is that this child is presumptively a Christian* (ibid., 13) (italics original).

According to Calvin children born to believing parents are already among the redeemed, and to deny the sacrament or to withhold baptism until such time that the individual chooses it for him/herself is to deny that the child is *already* regenerate, saved, forgiven and holy (Old, 1992, 134). Calvin contrasts infant baptism with the baptism of converting adults and argues that adults should not receive the sacrament without first professing faith and repenting of sin. But children born to godly parents have no such need being already inheritors of the promises of the covenant. In converting adult's baptism signifies what has *become* in an individual's life but infant baptism signifies what *already is*. Additionally, baptism demarcated parents and other family members as those individuals making a responsible commitment to the Christian upbringing of the child. But baptism in Calvin's Geneva went a step further.

As conceived by Jean Calvin and his colleagues, the Genevan baptismal ceremony laid out certain relationships among church leaders, city magistrates, parents and godparents, all of whom had a role to play in the upbringing of each Genevan child (Spierling, 2005, 14).

In other words, it was not just parents and close relatives that had a hand in a child's Christian upbringing. It was members of the entire community who together strove to create the "perfect school of Christ" (Schenck, 2003, 4-5) in which a baptised and regenerate child of the covenant could grow and flourish in his/her faith and towards that aim the church worked closely with the civil government. It was perhaps an ideal that never reached fulfilment but clearly the goal was to create not just a godly church but a godly society and "a well-ordered and pious community" (Spierling, 2005, 54).

The danger in striving after a godly society is that Christianity eventually becomes the accepted norm and baptism becomes routine. Instead of witnessing to the marvel of an individual's entry into the church and into the kingdom baptism all too easily becomes associated with entry into the civic community or even into national citizenship and when parents and communities take for granted or neglect their role as living witnesses to faith then baptism and the Christian nurture of covenant children loses its meaning. In the opinion of this author there is no reason *not* to baptise the infant children of believing parents but when the surrounding culture lacks either the knowledge or the inclination to provide a supporting role to the efforts of faithful parents then the church must take action. On one hand, it might revamp its efforts to equip and enable the parents of baptised children to faithfully live up to their baptismal commitments and there is merit in doing so. But on the other, when the culture has fallen so far from the ideal of the perfect school of Christ that it is no longer demonstratively Christian then the church does well to reconsider its practice of baptism. Infant baptism makes sense when children are born to believing parents amidst a believing church community within a culture that is, if not conscientiously Christian then at least nominally so. But when these vital supports have fallen away the church does well to reconsider baptism as an act of adult conversion. In the remaining section of this chapter I will contend this very thing by demonstrating that contemporary Scotland has drifted so far from its historic moorings in Christianity that it is now a thoroughly secular society.

The Rise of the Secular

The culture of Britain and Scotland has changed immeasurably over the last sixty years and the church has changed with it or perhaps better said, the church has been changed *by* it most visibly in the form of numerical decline. Where sixty years ago the church may have functioned to guide and shape British and Scottish society the locus of that discursive power has now shifted to the secular. In this chapter I will look at religious decline in Britain generally and in Scotland specifically with a view to understanding the wider context within which baptism figures have fallen so precipitously in the Church of Scotland since 1963. The bulk of available statistical information on baptism is for *infant* baptism so it will have to serve as an adequate basis for my study of *adult* baptism. However, it is my contention that the observed trend away from infant baptism provides an adequately substantive foundation for my discussion of adult baptism. What follows is a

reporting of religious decline followed by a survey of recent literature aimed at discerning some of the complex reasons for that decline and ending with an explication of Charles Taylor's work on the subject of secularism and the contemporary age. I will address the subject of baptism in the Church of Scotland more directly in subsequent chapters but in this introduction it is necessary to develop an understanding of the secular culture within which the *church* functions before moving to a more detailed examination of how *baptism* functions.

Religious Decline and Growth

In his study of religion covering the years 1900-2000, Callum Brown notes that during that time frame there were "...dramatic falls in levels of churchgoing, church membership, religious marriage, baptism and Sunday school attendance" (Brown, 2006, 3-4).¹ Between 1900-1997, religious marriages in England dropped from 85 to 39%, and from 94 to 55% in Scotland. Rates of infant baptism dropped over the last century in the Church of England from 61% of all births in 1900, to 19.8% in 2000 (ibid.). Churchgoing also fell off in England, from 25-30% in 1900 down to approximately 7.5 in 2000 with regional variations falling off farther. Scotland witnessed further decline in churchgoing and between 1900 and 2002 dropped from 30 to 11.2% of the population (ibid., p. 27). The Brierly Consultancy records the number of church attenders in Scotland falling from 12.3% of the population in 2000 to 9% in 2010 to 7.2% in 2017. It is forecast to drop to 5.3% by 2025.² Actual weekly attendance for the Church of Scotland was 371,100 in 1980 but had fallen to 145,700 by 2015.³ Scottish church *membership* has suffered similarly. Actual membership in the Church of Scotland has fallen from 1,301,280 in 1960 to 970,741 in 1979, to 351,934 in 2016.⁴

Religious attendance and adherence figures reveal one part of the picture but records of religious practice are perhaps a better indicator of religious interest amongst the population. Baptism is an important indicator of religious interest and in the Church of

¹ Religious decline in Britain is well-documented and I am indebted to the work of many scholars on the subject and detail on this is available from many sources (Davie, 1994, 2007; Field, 2011; Garnett et al. 2006; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Day, 2012; Voas, 2005; the Brierly Consultancy, and others).

² <http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com/scottish-church-census/> [Accessed 29 May 2017]

³ <http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/church-attendance-in-britain-1980-2015/> [Accessed 29 May 2017]

⁴ Detail provided by Fiona Tweedie, Mission Statistics Co-ordinator for the Church of Scotland.

Scotland those numbers have dropped year on year. At its peak in 1963 the Church of Scotland baptised fully half of the infants born in Scotland, but the numbers fell steadily each year from there. Figure 1.1⁵ shows the number of births and the number of infant baptisms while Figure 1.2 provides a graphic indicator of the declining number of baptisms relative to the number of births. The Church of Scotland baptises a smaller *percentage* of the infants born each year indicating either the waning influence of the church or waning interest among its remaining members and adherents for the sacrament itself. Most likely both. Figure 1.3 shows the decline in the number of adult baptisms the greatest contrast lying between 1962 and 1972 during which time the number of adult baptisms more than halved. The absence of baptism in early life affects the number of children moving to church membership in later life. In the Church of England, between 1903 and 1997 that number was halved from 42% to 20% and in Scotland between 1900 and 1998 that number fell from 75% to 17% (Brown, 2006, 4). Statistical data says little about the reasons the lie behind the steep decline in religious behaviour but since the 1960's the trend is almost invariably downwards. As Brown writes: "All the figures for Christian affiliation are at their lowest point in history" (2001, 4).

⁵ Detail for Figures 1.1-3 retrieved from Church of Scotland Reports to the General Assembly, 1962-2016. Special thanks to Linda Jamieson, Secretary to the Clerk to the Assembly, and Allison Murray, Secretary to the Moderator of the General Assembly for their assistance.

Figure 1.1

Scottish birth rate and Church of Scotland infant baptisms: 1962-2016

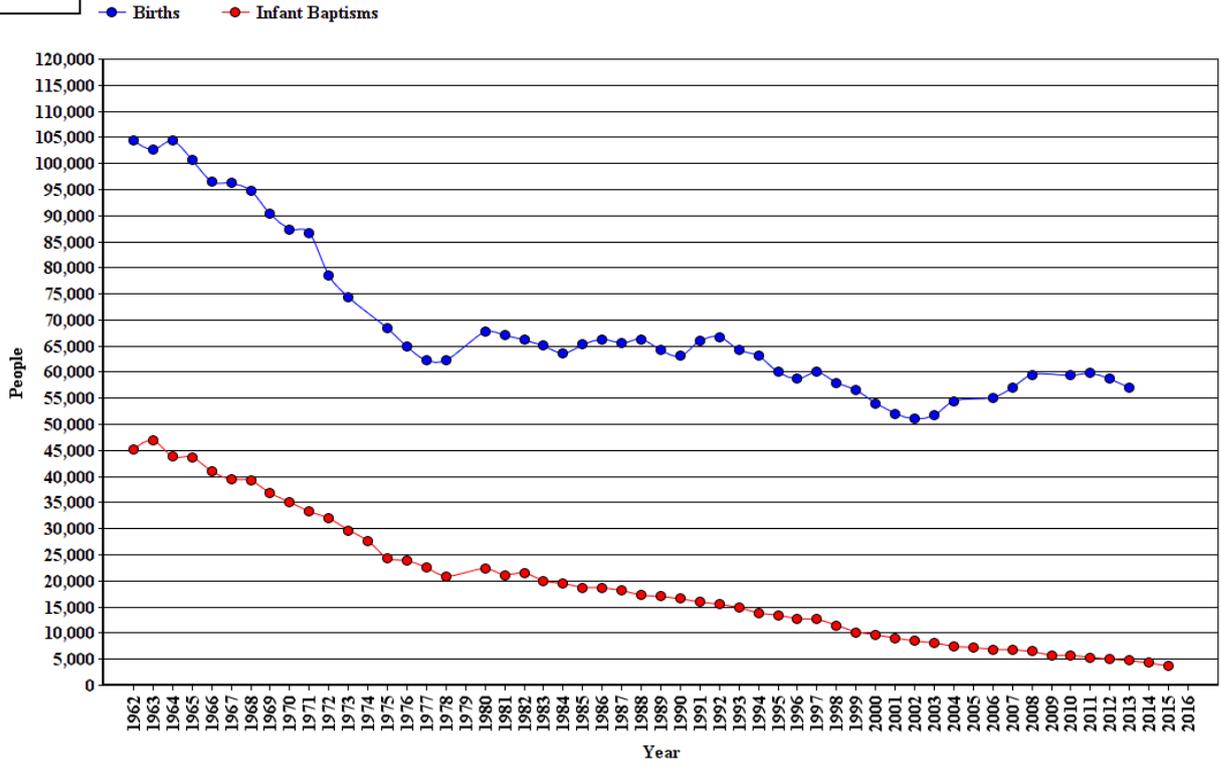


Figure 1.2

Infant baptisms relative to births

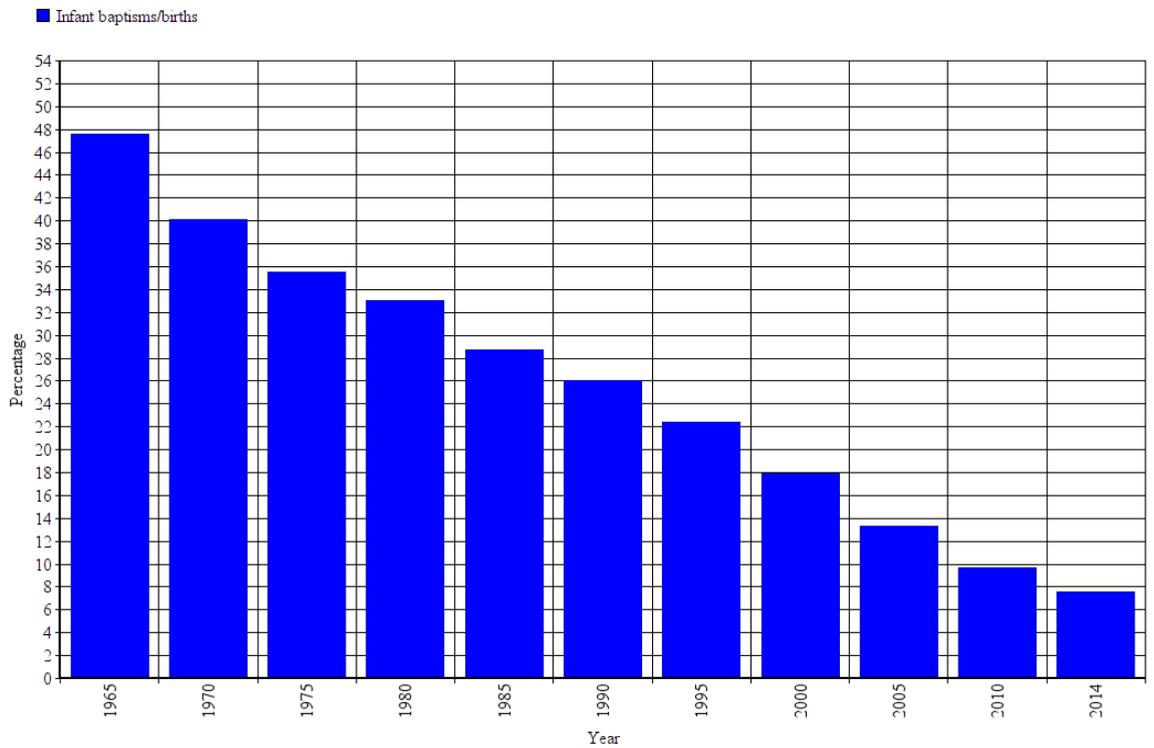
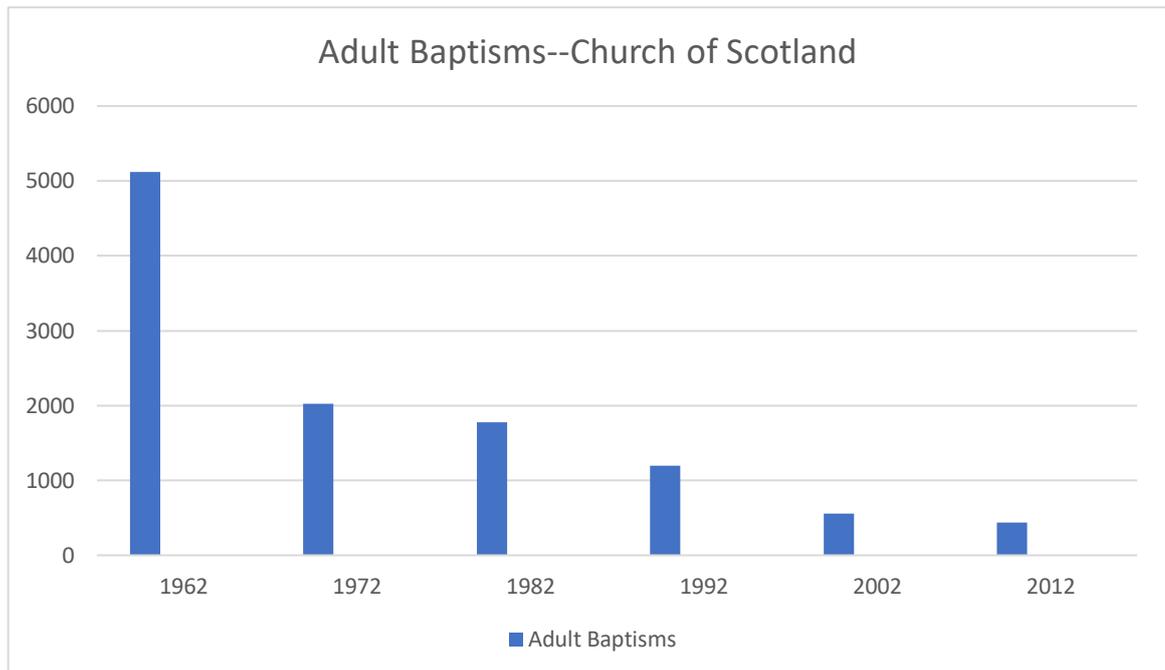


Figure 1.3



Detail from charts extracted from the Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (1962-2016).

Belonging and Believing

Curiously, expressed church belonging if not actual church membership remains high in many parts of Scotland. Approximately 32% of the Scottish population claims affiliation with the Church of Scotland. Another 16% declares allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church and a further 6% expresses belonging in “Other Christian” fellowships representing 54% of the population.⁶ Alongside falling church adherence in either attendance or membership is the corresponding rise in the number of people who claim “no religion” on census survey. Linda Woodhead (2013) in examining similar patterns in England generalizes by saying that roughly one third of the population claims adherence to the Church of England, one third to other Christian fellowships and the final third to no religion. The 2016 Scottish Social Attitude Survey⁷ revealed that 52% of the Scottish population said they had “no religion,” an increase from 40% in 1999 and also marked an

⁶ In my own parish in Hamilton, Scotland, the numbers are higher still: 42, 22, and 7% respectively, a cumulative total of 71%, Church of Scotland, *Statistics for Mission*, http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/stats_for_mission

⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-35953639> [Accessed 29 May 2017]

important tipping point in religious record keeping in that for the first time a *majority* of the Scottish population now said they not only had no church affiliation but no religion at all. Those who said they “belong” to the Church of Scotland fell from 35% in 1999 to 20% in 2016. Religious belonging is difficult to ascertain and is affected by the phrasing of the survey question. For example, Abby Day (2012) argues that the high number of respondents claiming to “belong” may have been unduly influenced by the way in which the question about religion was phrased. “What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?” The language suggests that some form of religious belonging is socially normative thus influencing some to profess adherence with little to indicate that their adherence had any practical behavioural impact.

Religious surveys clearly generate a mixed set of data from which it is difficult to obtain an accurate picture of religion in Britain. Goodhew (2012) argues that the story of decline is partial and misleading and excludes a growing body of evidence for significant growth in religious practice. He suggests that church statistics be read with caution citing the apparent behavioural discrepancy amongst 18-34-year-olds, 47 % of whom responded to the 2011 census by saying they had no church affiliation. And yet this same group answered that they prayed “occasionally or regularly,” demonstrating that religious behaviour is not necessarily associated with religious belonging (*ibid.*, 5). Linda Woodhead, in her 2013 YouGov survey found similarly confusing answers amongst the population sample in Scotland when respondents who reported affiliation with the Presbyterian church⁸ were little different than those who expressed “no religion.” Consider for example the oft used expression of being “spiritual, but not religious.” Amongst the general population 13% described themselves as spiritual and 7% religious, while those affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, 8% spiritual and 14% religious. Nearly half in both categories answered they were *neither* religious nor spiritual. While not surprising to find that figure (49%) amongst the general population it is remarkable that nearly half (45%) of those within the Presbyterian Church think of themselves as *neither* spiritual nor religious. Digging deeper into religious belief the survey queried those who answered that there was “definitely or probably a God.” Again, the results are surprising with 54% of the general population answering “God,” 19% a “universal life force or energy,” and 25% answering “I’m not sure” but I believe there is “something there.” Presbyterians answered the same questions with figures of 40%, 29% and 29%. It is

⁸ Woodhead does not clarify if the survey was unique to the Church of Scotland or was inclusive of other Presbyterian churches in Scotland.

surprising that more people *outside* the church are confident to express God as God while less than half do so *within* the church. Why are those within the church happier to describe their sense of God in vague terms as a “universal life force” or only “something there”? Following on from my earlier discussion about belief, *ought* there be a difference between the expressed beliefs and attitudes of those outside the church versus those inside the church? And if there is little to differentiate is it unreasonable to suggest that the apparent similarities might contribute to an overall sense of malaise about the effective function of the church? If there is no boundary to be crossed between one community and the other the church ought not be surprised to find that such a sizable percentage of the population declare a sense of belonging. There are no sensible markers to indicate that they *do not* actually belong.

But if religious belonging does not necessarily indicate the adoption of religious behaviours then what does it mean? Grace Davie proposed a novel description of this dichotomy when she coined the phrase “believing without belonging” (Davie, 2007, 139) suggesting that those who supported the church without participating in it practised “vicarious religion.” She writes: “By vicarious, I mean the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who implicitly at least not only understand, but quite clearly approve of what the minority is doing” (ibid., 2007, 127). She argues there is a sense amongst the general populace that belief and often very particular beliefs are vital for the ongoing function of society but that most are prepared to allow the burden of maintaining that belief go to a small minority of the population. She contends that many who believe without belonging participating vicariously and think of the church as a public utility with little sense of personal engagement. She writes:

Most Europeans regard the church with benign benevolence—they are useful social institutions, which the great majority in the population are likely to need at one point or another in their lives (particularly at the time of death). It simply does not occur to most people that the church will or might cease to exist but for their active participation (ibid., 87).

It is debatable whether the general population of Scotland views the church with benign benevolence or has any sense of whether their belief bears any resemblance to the beliefs espoused by the church. But to justify this claim more needs to be said about the nature of that belief. Abby Day (2012) takes Davie’s idea of believing without belonging one step

further by pondering what it is people say they believe when they say they belong. She argues that Davie never clearly states her working understanding of “believing” (Day, 2012, 8). Day argues that many who say they belong to the church often subscribe to beliefs that are very different from and even antithetical to traditional church teaching and that belief means something altogether different for them:

Belief for many people is a statement of self, a way of saying who they are: ‘I believe, therefore I am.’ As I began to listen more closely...I began to understand belief as being more connected to personal values, trust and emotion than to facts, propositions or creeds (ibid., 44).

Later, Day elaborates as to the locus of those relationships:

Most people believe in their relationships with other people...those with whom they have adherent, affective reciprocal relationships, most commonly partners, family, and friends (ibid., 156).

In this sense belief is an expression of self. Beyond the immediate relational circle however, the word belief loses much of its communal effect. We are not believers who declare a common creed and therefore belong together. We belong to those we know more by association rather than propositional framework, that is belief does not mean ascription to doctrinal statements but is rather an expression of belonging. According to Day, belief means belonging to “adherent, reciprocal emotional relationships.” Day argues for what she describes as a “performative belief:”

a neo-Durkheimian construct, where belief is not pre-formed but a lived, embodied performance, brought into being through action and where the object of worship is not an entity such as a god or ‘society,’ but the experience of belonging (ibid., 194).

Believing and belonging then serve very different functions and often have little to do with actual affiliation with the church or agreement about the sacred. This has practical implications for a church that has traditionally placed a heavy emphasis on belief and belonging for its members. New church members for example are asked at confirmation:

Believing in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and confessing Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, do you promise to join regularly with your fellow Christians in worship on the Lord's Day? (*Common Order*, 2005, p. 117).

But what are they affirming? Is it problematic to the church when belief is a "statement of self...more connected to personal values, trust and emotion than to facts, propositions or creeds"? And more importantly, does the locus of belief transfer from the self to the "One God"? Does the sense of belonging shift from the "reciprocal relationships" of family and friends to the new community of the local church with whom the church asks new members to "join regularly"? It is my contention that for many the answer that question is no. Belief remains a subjective experience defined by the "believer" and not the church. It is not my intention to lay blame at the feet of those whose beliefs diverge so much from those they publicly profess, rather it is to call the attention of the church to the fact that belief means something very different today from what it may have meant sixty years ago. Without making effort to encourage reflection on the part of those making the kinds of promises asked by the church, those beliefs will likely remain unchanged and when a *congregation* is comprised of individuals who have made the same promises and yet retained the prerogative to define belief and primary relations on their own terms, then the church is something less than a community of the faithful or followers of Jesus Christ. It is in fact little more than a secular community.

Religious Decline

How is religion measured? How is it evaluated over time? What constitutes religious "growth" and religious "decline"? Brown (2001) argues that:

'Religious decline' is an emotive, loaded term. It is the product of a long tradition that runs deep into the conceptual framework of social science and into the modern Christian church's construction of its mission (Brown, 2001, 16).

In order to make sense of its own practice in the nineteenth century church developed an interest in and a method for justifying its own convictions about the secularisation theory by defining, numerically "what religion is" and what it isn't (Brown, 2001, 30). Under the leadership of Thomas Chalmers, the church clarified religious and irreligious behaviour

with the use of social-science statistics. Taking up the ministerial charge at the Tron Kirk in 1815 Chalmers was struck by the immensity of the social problems he encountered in the city slums of his parish which was comprised of over 11,000 souls (ibid., 22). He raised the concern with his congregation that the “mighty mass of a city population” must be brought “under the control of Christian and humanized principle” (ibid., 31). Brown writes that four years later Chalmers published his influential book, *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns* in which he developed the statistical methods of the newly burgeoning field of social-science and demonstrated “how far irreligion had taken hold in working-class industrial towns” (ibid., 23). It is extraordinary what Chalmers and those who applied his methods were able to do in providing social care to the British people under the aegis of religion. Brown states that Chalmers and subsequent church leaders and social scientists as late as the 1980’s took for granted that industrial development and urban growth led inevitably to secularisation and the decline of the church (ibid., 28). Brown argues that Chalmers’ use of social statistics instigated significant religious revival in the form of social outreach to the “irreligious” of his day namely on behalf of those entrapped in poverty, “prostitution, drink and gambling.” Chalmers embraced the Enlightenment theories of classical economics but:

To bend religion to economic principles, they had to draw up the laws, the rules, by which religion could be defined like any other economy: what it was to be religiously ‘rich’ and what it was to be religiously ‘poor’ (ibid., 31).

In other words, religion had to be quantified and this necessitated the use of numbers; but numbers are not neutral—they suggest value or lack of value to the things to which they are assigned and using numbers to explain or to justify religious behaviour is highly problematic. There is nonetheless a tendency amongst social scientists to embrace the use of numbers for the sake of legitimising social science research. C. W. Smith writes:

Some advocate that if social sciences are ever to become ‘real sciences’ then quantitative measurements must be used. Others argue that the subject matter of the social sciences is simply not amenable to quantification and all attempts to impose such measures and methods upon social behaviour is just so much nonsense (Smith, 1989, 29).

For example, a higher number implies a higher value or a greater worth than a lower number. But who assigns that value and who determines what thing has more value than another? Charles Taylor rehearses an argument highlighting the inherent problems associated with the use of numbers in qualitative matters:

Things have significance not in themselves but because people deem them to have it—as though people could determine what is significant either by decision, or perhaps, unwittingly and unwillingly just by feeling that way (Taylor, 1991, 36).

To assign a number is to declare that an item or in the case of the church, a religious practice has intrinsic value. Additionally, the assignation of numerical value suggests a standard by which value is assessed. The higher the number the nearer to the idealised standard and inversely the lower the number the farther from the idealised standard. Whether a thing or a behaviour has real value is not the issue. Assigning a number *constitutes* its value and creates value by making the item or the behaviour quantifiable. For example, to place a number on church membership is to say that church membership has intrinsic value. Naturally, higher membership implies higher value and closer proximity to the idealised standard. Attendance is another easily quantifiable religious practice as are weekly collections or children in Sunday school or the number of “souls saved” or the percentage of the population that believes in the bodily resurrection of Jesus or virtually any other pattern of religious behaviour or belief that the *church* chooses to esteem with a number. Things that are numbered, valued and esteemed are things to which the church naturally applies greater attention either in the form of celebration at its high numbers or desolation with its dwindling numbers. With the use of numbers in the form of statistics the church inherently encourages some religious behaviours and implicitly discourages others. Those that are measured and measurable are esteemed more highly than those that are not.

Chalmers’ use of statistical survey had a profound effect on the religious life and activity of the church throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. Statistics were used to drive the church and to define its mission. Falling numbers preceded and motivated a surge of new activity in the cause of Christ and literally moved congregations into the streets and neighbourhoods of the parish to address the needs of the “irreligious masses” to stem the tide of secularism they believed came inevitably with urban life (Brown, 2001, 43-57). But they also defined what it meant to be religious and

handed to later social scientists the tools to justify arguments for the decline of the church and the inevitable progress of secularisation. Where statistics of religious behaviour formerly came from within the church and were used to stimulate evangelical mission, in many cases they now come from without the church and have a very different effect. Intentionally or unintentionally, falling numbers justify the argument for religious decline and create the sense of inevitable ecclesiastical demise. Numbers are used to evaluate religious behaviour, but they are far from value-free especially when the church has experienced *falling* numbers for sixty years. Falling statistical figures have the capacity to create a sense of resignation and spiritual torpor; instead of being used as the means to a constructive end they become the end in themselves. Chalmers used statistics to provide the impetus for social mission, but today's figures seem to do little more than document religious decline.

Some scholars argue that religious decline is not fully descriptive of religious life in Britain. Goodhew (2012) for example points out that church *growth* is simply under-reported but is nonetheless well documented in “areas of migration, population growth and economic dynamism” and “corridors of church growth have developed alongside major economic arteries...and the growing cities of London, York and Edinburgh” (ibid., 8). Wolff and Jackson (2012) mention London in particular as an example of remarkable church growth, pointing to a 70% increase in the number of Anglican churches in the Diocese of London between 1990 and 2010 (ibid., 23), this in spite of the fact that other Anglican dioceses were declining over the same period. Goodhew concedes that church growth diminishes with distance from London and that there is much to support arguments for religious decline and secularisation in northern England, Wales and Scotland but maintains that decline is not universal and there are examples of church growth in these locales as well (Goodhew, 9). A number of new churches have been established and some revived or at least slowed in decline with the influx of immigrant populations, especially African and Polish (Duffour, 2012, 145; Roxburgh, 2012, 215). The 2016 Scottish Church Census revealed that over 500 new churches had been started over the last five years adding an additional 6,000 to weekly attendance figures (Brierly, 2017). *Messy Church* and *Fresh Expressions* are but two examples of religious growth to indicate that interest in religious activity remains a present reality in British culture. Aisthorpe (2013, 2016) argues in the same vein that while church decline in Scotland is undeniable it is not necessarily indicative that faith has declined with it. Aisthorpe's study revealed an interesting trend in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. He found that many who leave

the church retain a deep sense of faith and some even acknowledge that leaving the church was important or essential for maintaining and developing their faith. He writes: “The fact is that most Christians living beyond church congregations find the lack of institutional ties liberating, a situation that positively enables their Christian vocation” (2016, 35).

Aisthorpe complains that statistical surveys fail to take note of what he calls “churchless Christians” and lack the subtlety to pick up on the vibrancy of faith lived outside the institutional church. His findings provide evidence that religion may be declining more slowly than surveys indicate but they nonetheless ought to raise concern that the church is in some respects contributing to its own demise by maintaining an ethos that is counter-productive to a flourishing Christian life. This implies a loss of confidence in the church as the sole purveyor of the sacred and it raises questions for the long term about how those who have left the church will understand the role of the sacraments in their religious life. Will they bring children for baptism or seek baptism for those who join their small house-church style fellowships? Will the Lord’s Supper serve in the same way as a sustaining spiritual meal? Wherein lies the authority for religious and scriptural teaching?

Goodhew and Aisthorpe believe there is good reason for encouragement. While Europe and Britain face severe church decline, both authors point to significant, even dramatic church growth in China, Korea and Brazil indicating that worldwide 80,000 per day people are embracing the faith for the first time (Aisthorpe, 2016, 24). They do so to indicate that church decline is a British and European anomaly and unusual of Christianity generally.

Goodhew argues that:

Many contemporary British theologians, church leaders and churches have unconsciously or consciously internalized both the secularization thesis and its eschatology of decline, thereby creating an ecclesiology of fatalism...and [that] encourages the redefinition of Christianity so that *shrinking congregations are considered unproblematic* (Goodhew, 2012, 19, italics mine).

This is a serious claim to make and if accurate ought to give the church serious pause for reflection. Goodhew effectively contends that the church has embraced an alternative narrative from that of its founding. An “ecclesiology of fatalism” is one that is deeply antithetical to the Gospel claim of good news and an “eschatology of decline” is one bereft of hope for Christ’s return and promised redemption of His church. Goodhew’s arguments are worthy of consideration and “growth amidst decline” (Brierly, 2016) is certainly

encouraging to a church wearied with six decades of falling numbers, but the fact that the church so meticulously analyses its *own* decline indicates that decline is still considered *highly* problematic. Discouragement is undoubtedly rife in the church, but discouragement is not the same thing as resignation or despair or fatalism and certainly does not indicate a revised eschatology. Goodhew is right to celebrate church growth where it occurs, and growing congregations may represent the beginning of a revived Christian practice in Britain. What Goodhew fails to account for is the profound shift in cultural assumptions about the role and function of religion in contemporary British and Scottish culture. In order to make sense of these changes it is necessary to develop a more nuanced understanding of secularisation.

Secular₃

In his seminal work, *A Secular Age* (2007) Charles Taylor elucidates the concept of secularisation by defining three types. James Smith (2011, 20-23) describes them helpfully as secular₁, secular₂, and secular₃. The bulk of Taylor's work is dedicated to the explication of secular₃, but it is helpful for the sake of argument to define secular₁ and secular₂. Secular₁ is typified by the loss of religious reference in the public arena. Contrasting the present with an earlier non-secular age Taylor writes:

Whereas the political organisation of all pre-modern societies was in some way connected to, based on, guaranteed by some faith in, or adherence to God, or some notion of ultimate reality, the modern Western state is free from this connection...in our secular societies, you can fully engage in politics without ever encountering God (Taylor, 2007, 1).

In Scotland this has been typified by the gradual handing over to the state of functions formerly managed by the church, including: schools, hospitals, welfare systems, etc. (Turner, 2011, 128). While the argument behind these transfers of power has typically been economic there was with them a concomitant divestment of religious authority and significance. Taylor explains secular₁ further by illustrating that in pre-modern societies the divide placed between religion and other aspects of daily life would have been incomprehensible to those living in a pre-modern age (Taylor, 2007, 2). Compartmentalising religion or making faith a so-called "private matter" would have been

inconceivable. The distinction between pre-modern and modern religious sensibilities is important for reforming the church's Gospel message in the contemporary world.

Taylor defines secular₂ in much the same way as it has been described above, "the falling off of religious belief and practice in people turning away from God and no longer going to church" (ibid.). Alongside the falling off of religious practice is the associated falling off of religious *influence* in society and culture. In discussing secularisation Brown paints a picture of the loss of cultural influence by contrasting Britain with the nineteenth century:

There was nothing secular whatever in the nineteenth-century British society. It was a society which knew well, from top to bottom, what it ought to believe and ought to do religiously... When members of society did not do the expected and observable 'religious things' they were loudly harangued by the moral and religious gatekeepers from pulpit, corner gossip shop and Sunday lunch table. This was the discursivity of faith-power (Brown, 2003, 35-36).

The discursive power of religion was so pervasive that even those not participating in religious activity felt obliged to act as if they did. Religion, specifically the Christian religion defined British culture and had the compulsive power to go on doing so. Brown argues that the 1960's witnessed a final and decisive break with this cultural influence and saw the rise of the first truly secular society, forming the crucible of what Taylor/Smith describe as secular₃:

The shift to secularity in this sense consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among many, and frequently not the easiest to embrace (Taylor, 2007, 2).

In secular₃ religion truly becomes a choice and a personal one at that. If we define religion in the traditional manner of church membership and attendance at worship then it becomes clear that only a small percentage of the population *choose* religion. What makes that choice increasingly difficult is the shrinking numbers of those making the same choice, especially when it comes to the religious choices of those we know and respect. Taylor writes:

I may find it inconceivable that I would abandon my faith, but there are others, including some very close to me, whose way of living I cannot in all honesty just dismiss as depraved, or blind, or unworthy who have no faith (at least not faith in God, or the transcendent) (Taylor, 2007, 3).

In this sense our faith commitments are relative, that is a person cannot help but see his affirmative religious decisions in light of those who make the same decision in the negative. The challenge is compounded when those who chose against religion are those we know and love. Beyond church attendance, when there is little to distinguish a religious life from a non-religious life “there will be people who feel bound to give it up, even if they mourn its loss” (ibid.). It is not an unreasonable supposition that the many who still express their religious affiliation on census surveys but who do not participate in a worshipping community, are among those who mourn the loss of their faith. Faith is difficult to sustain when practised in isolation from the relationships that populate our lives beyond the church making the community of the church all the more important. As a key function of entry into church life the ritual of baptism has the potential to create and sustain a profound sense of connection with one’s church community, a connection that may well transcend all others.

There are several other terms coined by Taylor that are useful for understanding the issues that complicate devotion to religious faith. These include: “nova effect,” “immanent frame” and “unthought.” Woodhead (2014) and Voas (2009, 155) highlight the fact that there is no longer a binary choice between religious and non-religious, believer and non-believer. There are “fuzzy” shades of grey and lines between groups that cannot be cleanly drawn. Each of these scholars divided the population into four categories that lie between belief and unbelief with sub-categories defined by a person’s relative association with traditional religious sensibilities and practices. Taylor complexifies the religious landscape further with his term: “the nova effect,” arguing in like manner that there are not two or four categories, but a multiplicity of options for what he describes in Weberian terms as a quest for meaning or significance (2007, 299-300) or as Taylor himself describes it, human flourishing. Smith writes that the nova effect is “the astronomical metaphor [that] indicates an explosion of options for finding (or creating) significance” (Smith, 2011, 62). It is as if the world has become a religious supermarket with an endless and bewildering number of options. The result is that the consumer is confused, irritable and ultimately, apathetic (Byron, 2011), a religious trend already witnessed by Bruce (1999, 4, as cited in

Taylor, 2007, 434). Taylor argues that this “pluralisation” leads to “fragilization,” or loss of confidence in religious convictions (Werner, Antwerpen and Calhoun, 2010, 23). Fragilization increases with our relative proximity to those adhering to different belief systems and our personal identification with those respective witnesses. When an alternative religious or non-religious belief is practiced by someone socially different from us it is less threatening than it is in someone who shares the same social, professional or familial bonds leading us to ask “why my way, and not hers?” (Taylor, 2007, 304).

Taylor answers his own question by arguing that one’s decision about religion is based on his/her own interpretation of the “immanent frame” that encloses modern thinking and living. Smith writes that the immanent frame is a:

Metaphorical concept—alluding to a “frame” that both boxes in and boxes out, encloses and focuses—is meant to capture the world we now inhabit in our secular age (Smith, 2011, 92).

In other words, it is a way of thinking about how the world *is*, a way that constitutes a *natural* order of things instead of a *supernatural* order (ibid.). Within that frame one is left to consider his/her own view of what Taylor describes as “transcendence” or the sense of something beyond what is known in the immanent world we inhabit, namely the transcendent God of religious belief (Taylor, 2007, 15). It is our relationship to transcendence within the immanent frame that governs our religious choices by focusing on ultimate goals of human life. Taylor posits two: human flourishing or something beyond it and above it. How one defines human flourishing depends on how one answers questions like “What constitutes a fulfilled life? What makes life worth living?” (ibid., 16). For Taylor it is a matter of belief, but not belief in a set of doctrines or theories to which one subscribes but rather a lived condition (ibid., 7) in which assumptions about the nature of reality and human life govern unconsciously one’s thinking about ultimate goods (Taylor, 1989, 42). The locus of the ultimate good differs according to our belief about our lives within the immanent frame of modern existence. For believers:

The sense is that fullness comes to them, that it is something they receive...for modern unbelievers...the power to reach fullness is within (Taylor, 2007, 8).

Fullness or human flourishing is then either *received* from without or *achieved* from within. The non-believer is capable of and responsible for creating his/her own sense of fullness irrespective of what may or may not lie beyond the bounds of the immanent frame. Alternately, for the believer there remains "...a possibility of transformation...which takes us beyond merely human perfection..." (ibid., 20), a power and a potentiality that lies outside the immanent frame. For Taylor this is summarised as God's *agape* love, "the love that God has for us, and which we can partake of through his power" (ibid.).

How one interprets and defines the secular depends on one's sense of personal presence within the immanent frame, most especially one's conception about whether that frame is open or closed to the transcendent. Taylor describes this curiously as the "unthought," a concept Smith defines as "The presuppositions that undergird an account of secularity and the decline of religious practice" (Smith, 2011, 143). Taylor contends that advocates for secularization and various "death of God scenarios" do so on the conviction that religion has somehow been proven false and must inevitably decline in the face of new understandings about science, the supernatural and the misplaced authority of religion over that of the autonomous individual (Taylor, 2007, 427-429). Taylor maintains that such unthoughts "bedevil" (ibid., 428) the arguments about secularisation and unfairly influence the analysis of religious trends. His primary interest is in raising questions about theories of secularisation that forecast the inevitable decline of religion and religious practice. There is no argument that secular₂ is readily evidenced but Taylor is interested in what he calls the "transformation perspective" of religion (ibid., 430) or the belief that humanity's highest goal goes beyond human flourishing. He argues that secularisation is rooted in the proposition that "modernity has led to a decline in the transformation perspective" of religion (ibid., 431). Religion has lost its core function of relating individuals to the transcendent and must find some other justification for its ongoing existence (ibid., 42-43). In Taylor's estimation one's unthought leads to differing explanations of the *causes* of secularisation and religious decline. If one's unthought is coloured by the presupposition that religion is false, illusory or merely immanent then it is doomed to failure and its social function must derive from something other than mediating what was formerly understood as sacred. However, if one's unthought is directed by an ongoing sense of the transcendent or the sacred, s/he will be far more inclined to think of religious practice as a necessary even essential aspect of human flourishing. My argument is that just as the secularist is governed by the unthought, so is the church member and religious adherent. When one retains a transformation perspective on religion, or finds in religion "...something else that

takes them beyond or outside what is generally thought of as flourishing” (Taylor, 2007, 430) or when there is a lingering sense of the transcendent beyond the immanent frame of contemporary existence, when one is influenced by an unthought that is favourably disposed to the effective power of religion, then religion has the capacity to remain socially functional, but not without addressing a further complicating factor of what Taylor describes as individualism.

It was Taylor’s concept of subjectivization that provided the cornerstone for Heelas and Woodhead’s study *The Spiritual Revolution*. In it they argue that:

The massive subjective turn of modern culture favours and reinforces those forms of spirituality which resource unique subjectivities and treat them as a primary source of significance, and undermines those forms of religion that do not (Heelas, Woodhead, 2005, 78; Taylor, 1991, 26).

People do not want to be told what to believe or how to behave or how to make sense of life on another’s terms and are “no longer willing to submit” to traditional roles and expectations as defined by the institutional church (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, 112). Doctrinal belief or unbelief was less important than the *locus* of that belief. People yearn for the permission and prerogative to define spirituality on their own terms or to “freestyle” their religious beliefs (Bruce, 2014, 6). Where an individual is allowed and encouraged to develop his or her own ideas about spirituality, whether it be in a church or in any number of other gatherings there grows a sense of self that was absent before. If there is a shift at work it is away from community life and towards the individual life. *We* define who we are rather than *being* defined by institutional or social expectation. Taylor argues this is rooted in individualism. He writes:

We live in a world where people have a right to choose for themselves their own pattern of life, to decide in conscience what convictions to espouse, to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways that their ancestors couldn’t control (Taylor, 1991, 2).

While some argue that individualism is “the finest achievement of modern civilisation” (ibid.) it has not come without a cost which Taylor suggests is two-fold. The first is the loss of any sense of moral horizon or understanding of oneself as part of some larger

cosmic order or “great chain of being in which humans figured in their proper place along with angels, heavenly bodies and our fellow earthly creatures” (ibid., 3). The second is the dissolution of personal obligation to a wider community. Abandoning the sense of cosmic order had the benefit of releasing individuals from socially imposed roles and stations but at the same time erased the social structure that gave to those same individuals a sense of their own place within a grand scheme. Order imposed from without the individual liberated people from the obligation of creating meaning and purpose for themselves and it also maintained a clear function for ritual and held inviolable the role of the sacred in human life. The rituals of the church preserved social order and were fundamentally necessary for life together (Taylor, 2007, 42-43) but with the coming of individualism all of this changed. Participation in any order beyond the immediate confines of the self became voluntary and essentially unnecessary for human fulfilment thus forcing the individual to take an instrumental view of society and to think of its constituent material or relational parts as existing solely for personal gain and fulfilment (Taylor, 1991, 56). Formerly a connection to some source outside the self, either “God or the Idea of the Good, was considered essential to full being. But, now the only source we have to connect with is deep in us” (ibid., 26). This is the “massive subjective turn” referenced by Heelas and Woodhead about which they write:

Underlying the subjectivization thesis is the Durkheimian principle that people are more likely to be involved with forms of the sacred which are consistent with their ongoing values and beliefs (Tamney, J.B., 2002, as cited in Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, 78).

But what values? What beliefs? And more particularly what “form of the sacred” will resonate in the now thoroughly secular culture of Britain and Scotland? How do those coming from a secular culture interpret the inherently *sacred* elements of the baptismal ritual? How do they understand their place in the inherently *communal* elements of the ritual? And in consequence how does the church interpret the rite of baptism to those with whom there is little agreement about what constitutes the sacred? And how does the church present baptism in a way that values the individual not only for his/her own sake but for his/her place within a uniquely baptised community? How can the church and the individual reconcile what might be very different “values and beliefs?” As has been evidenced in this chapter much has been written about secularisation and the so-called “decline” of religion and the church. My concern is that the church has yet to take

seriously the fact that so many of the newly baptised haven't adequately comprehended the difference between the values of a secular culture and those of the church. Secular attitudes about belief and belonging are unacknowledged and unchallenged; they are unconscious *ways of being* that often run counter to the church's message about Christian community as an expression of God's *agape* love. The difficulty is that many of those who populate the church today and perhaps some of those who lead it are similarly influenced by secular thinking (Charry, 1999, 243) so much so that there appears to be no distinction between secular life and Christian life, thus making claims of membership, belonging and believing open to all comers with the result that those important *baptismal* concepts lose their essential meanings. Durkheim argued that the function of religion is to mediate the sacred and the profane on behalf of the community through ritual action. The community is formed and sustained by common consensus and joint participation in and observation of sacred ritual. But without that common consensus between religious authority and the community it serves, religion loses its social function. While I agree with Durkheim that religion has the capacity to provide social and communal identity I am not convinced that it serves that role today. Given the multiplicity of ideas concerning the nature of what constitutes the sacred, the rise of individualism and the prerogative so many hold to describe their beliefs and belonging in their own terms it ought not come as a surprise that the institutional church has suffered such profound numerical decline.

In subsequent chapters of this thesis I will look into the ways in which the church of Scotland has revisited and redefined its own doctrine of baptism in light of cultural changes and subsequent diversity of baptismal practice within the church. I will do so in Chapter Two by reviewing the history of the Special Commission on Baptism and its subsequent reception. In Chapter Three I will look at the work of the Panel on Doctrine (1999-2003) and the landmark decisions that were approved by the 2003 General Assembly. Chapter Four is a review of several qualitative interviews I conducted within and without the Church of Scotland on the actual practice of adult baptism in the church. In Chapter Five I will draw my findings to a close and offer recommendations to the Church of Scotland with the aim of reconsidering and redeveloping its ministry of baptism.

CHAPTER TWO

The Special Commission Revisited

In 2003 the Panel on Doctrine¹ presented a report to the General Assembly that included a number of proposals that were intended to address a variety of pastoral problems faced by the Church of Scotland in its practice of baptism. The development of the final report represented the fruit of labour both within the Church of Scotland and without. The Panel took particular interest in the work of the Special Commission on Baptism (1952-1963) and reviewed the work and the decisions of prior General Assemblies (1983, 1991, 1999) at which the subject of baptism and the ongoing challenges of the 1963 Report were central. Additionally, the Panel looked beyond the Church of Scotland to Reformed Theologians of the nineteenth and 20th centuries and the writings of a variety of contemporary scholars. It considered the influence of a growing ecumenical movement on the subject of baptism with special attention paid to the work of the World Council of Churches. The Panel worked within the context and with a careful eye on the shifting sands of contemporary Scottish culture and were acutely aware of the fact that their work had implications not only for the baptismal doctrine and practice of the church but also for its missiology, ecclesiology and ecumenical relationships. Rather than just a *part* of the Church's ministry the Panel came to understand that baptism was and is profoundly central to the unique identity of the Church.

The 2003 Report introduced a number of recommendations that were intended to clarify the administration of baptism, but the Report differed in significant ways from its predecessors. The first was a call for the development of a service of thanksgiving for and blessing of, a child (Reports to the General Assembly 2003, 13/1).² The second, and I think most significant is included in its short Appendix A entitled *The Doctrine of Baptism*. The last two lines of that section read:

The primary image of baptism in the New Testament is that of a person being baptised upon personal profession of faith.

¹ The Panel on Doctrine included a number of parties formed to address particular issues including: ordination, baptism, the nature and purpose of the church, and the diaconate. It was the Working Party on Baptism that produced the 2003 Report that is the focus of this thesis. For the purposes of this chapter, and the remainder of this thesis, reference to the Panel on Doctrine is specific to the Working Party on Baptism.

² "Reports to the General Assembly" will henceforth be abbreviated as "RGA."

The primary image of the New Testament is complemented by the image of the baptism of the household upon corporate profession of faith (RGA 2003, 13/8).

There is no mention in *The Doctrine of Baptism* of *infant* baptism per se nor any use of the traditional arguments in support of infant baptism. The *Doctrine* makes no mention of Covenant nor has any suggestion that the baptism of children is a sign that God reaches out before we are able to respond in faith. Instead the *Doctrine* states that baptism is a “seal upon the gift of grace *and* the response of faith (RGA 2003, 13/1).” The language of the *Doctrine* is carefully chosen and leaves no question as to *whose* faith is expected in the baptism. It is not the faith of the parents or sponsors nor the faith of the church nor of the infant. The primary baptismal image witnessed in the New Testament is a *personal* profession of faith. The expectation was that the baptised individual would be *able* to respond in faith and would do so personally. In the baptismal moment the “Yes” (2 Corinthians 1:20, NIV) of God’s initiating grace is met by the “Yes” of the individual’s grateful response. This differs radically from the conclusions of the 1963 Special Commission Report, a subject to which I will turn later in this chapter.

Reading the 2003 Report the conclusions reached in *The Doctrine of Baptism* are not surprising. The practice of adult or baptism upon profession of faith is a theme that runs throughout (e.g., sections 1.2.2-1.2.7) but the Report is cautious in its tone. It makes no demands on the church to forsake the practice of infant baptism nor does it insist that the New Testament norm should be embraced wholesale in the contemporary era. But it does raise questions about the necessary primacy of infant baptism and the historic practice of the Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland in particular. Its cautious approach may well have been one of the reasons it found such willing acceptance at the 2003 Assembly, but it may also be the reason that its bold statement on the theology of adult baptism has been largely ignored in practice. In their original Report the Deliverance called for “the development of a basis of instruction on Baptism” that was to be based on their work in the “Doctrine of Baptism” and “The Doctrine of Baptism: An Exposition of the New Testament Basis.” Such a basis of instruction has not been forthcoming. There has been some progress including revisions in the 2005 edition of *Common Order* and the publication of a commentary on the new liturgy (Church of Scotland, 2006) but given the Panel’s express interest in the catechetical tools used in a number of other denominations it

is disappointing that no such resource has been developed for use in the Church of Scotland.

It is my conviction in this chapter and indeed in this thesis that the 2003 Report presented to the church an exciting new paradigm for understanding the practice of baptism in the Church of Scotland. Professing adults have always been eligible for baptism in the Church of Scotland but in practice the expected *norm* has been the baptism of infants. Adult baptism is not unheard of in the Church of Scotland and General Assembly records reflect annually the number of adult baptisms, but the figure is only a fraction of the number of infants baptised. Adult baptism is a rare event in the Church of Scotland with the consequence that many members of the church have never *seen* an adult baptism, and some are unaware that the sacrament is even *available* for an adult.³ In a practical sense adult baptism is an oddity for which few have precedent. By introducing a fresh approach to the reading of existing theologies and the witness of scripture the Panel shifted the focus of the church's practical theology from infant baptism to adult baptism. Without explicitly denigrating infant baptism the Panel moved the church to re-examine its initiatory rite. But baptismal practice lags behind that new focus and adult baptism remains the exception to the infant norm.

In this chapter I will consider two recent Ph.D. theses that have looked afresh at the work of the Special Commission and the contributions of the 2003 Panel on Doctrine Report. John Scott (2015) argues that the Special Commission over-reached the General Assembly's remit and under the convenorship of Tom Torrance used the opportunity to introduce a new theology of baptism. Scott illustrates that Torrance's theology has been little referenced and largely ignored both by the Church of Scotland and the wider circle of Reformed theology. The bulk of the work remains buried within the annals of the General Assembly Reports and has had little influence in the development of subsequent baptismal theologies.⁴ Ruth Morrison (2016) argues that Torrance heavily influenced the work of the Special Commission and that their work strayed beyond the historic norms of the Reformed church. The 1963 Assembly agreed that the Commission's work was a valid statement of baptismal theology but refused to embrace it as church law. The 2003 Panel

³ While it is difficult to generalize the findings of small scale qualitative interviews conducted by the author, given the relatively small number of actual adult baptisms in the Church of Scotland it is not unreasonable to assume that the results have general validity.

⁴ All of the Special Commission Reports have been subsequently made available online and are available at: http://commons.ptsem.edu/?qtext=series-id:report_spec_comm_bapt&series-title=Report+of+the+Special+Commission+on+Baptism

report goes a step further by calling into question many of the Special Commission's assertions implying that church practice has suffered accordingly. However, a theologian of Torrance's stature cannot be so easily dismissed and other scholars argue that his work with the Special Commission may well represent "the most significant contribution to a Reformed understanding of baptism since John Calvin" (Hunsinger, 2001). If so it has been greatly underutilized. These two new works provide a fresh engagement with Torrance and the Special Commission on Baptism. Alongside the contributions of the 2003 Panel on Doctrine they demonstrate a revived interest in the theology and practice of baptism in the Church of Scotland and create the opportunity to develop a baptismal practice that is well suited to the missiological challenges of contemporary Scotland.

In this next section I will look more closely at Torrance's baptismal theology as it is summarized by Scott (2015) and Morrison (2016) with the aim of developing a sense of Torrance's essential thinking on baptism. Given that the Church of Scotland has now turned its back on the conclusions of the Special Commission in regard to the historic norm of infant baptism it remains to be seen whether some of Torrance's ideas on baptism might still be useful in explicating a richer conception of baptism in responsible adults.

Scott on Torrance

John Scott writes: The Special Commission on Baptism began with a simple question, "Whose infant can be baptised?" It was intended as an effort to address the problem of a diversity of practice in baptism and a presumed diversity of understanding. In one sense it was a fairly simple remit that called for a fundamentally practical solution. But Torrance didn't think like that and instead "provided a longer answer to a broader question" (Scott, 2015, 193). The problem in his estimation was not so much a practical one as a fundamental misconception about the nature of baptism itself, a problem that dated all the way back to Augustine expressed most clearly in his catch-phrase that baptism was a "visible sign of an invisible grace." It was the inherent dualism of this definition that was at the root of the problem. Separating the subjective act of baptism in water from the objective event in baptism of union with Christ created practical confusion in the church's ministry of baptism. Torrance described this separation in terms of two Greek words: *baptismos* (the subjective act) and *baptisma* (the objective event). To illustrate the two terms Torrance references the act of preaching or *kerygma*. In preaching there is the act of

the minister proclaiming the Word but there is also the content of the preaching that is Christ himself. Torrance argues that there is no separation between the two but are rather indistinguishable parts of a whole. To separate the subjective event of the minister saying the word from the objective event of the presence of Christ in the preaching moment is to make a false distinction. Likewise, in baptism separating the rite and the Christ-event of baptism inevitably brings an unnatural focus on the rite itself. Torrance argues that the union of the subjective rite and the objective event is summarized in the New Testament word *baptisma* (ibid., 77-78).

To further elucidate these concepts Scott helpfully goes to the root of Torrance's Christology in the fourth chapter of his thesis. He begins with a discussion of the *homoousioun* and *hypostatic union*, that is Christ's union with the Father and the ontological union of God and humanity. Scott helpfully illustrates these two concepts in Torrance's writing by drawing on his unpublished New College lectures on the subject. Scott writes that:

Torrance enthused about the creed and called the *homoousion* the "king-pin" or "linchpin" of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, and argued that when we ask the question "Who is Jesus Christ?" Christology responds with the answer "God and man in one Person." Christ cannot be understood apart from His union in the Father, nor the Father appropriately understood in isolation from His self-revelation in the man Jesus Christ (Torrance, n.d., 1, as cited in Scott, 131-37).

Torrance argued that this mystery must include "wonder and thankfulness, in adoration and praise" (ibid., 131) and that it is a theology meant to be lived and prayed and sung. For Torrance Christ's first and foremost work was his ontological union with God not a work apart from himself but himself in its entirety. It is the union of Christ with the Father that Torrance argued "expressed the essential context of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ" (ibid.) and therefore is also central to the doctrine of baptism in that what is conveyed in baptism is not only Christ but Christ *in* God, fully *as* God and nothing less than the fullness of God. Revelation in Christ does not then convey something that is apart from God, as if Christ or some element or knowledge of Christ could somehow be separated from the Father. Scott writes: "Revelation is not merely the imparting of information, but rather reveals the self-giving God in our midst in the incarnate Son and the Father...this is God with us" (Scott, 133). That is, God does not reveal himself in part

through Christ and we do not see some quality of God here and another there, as if in Christ God could be divided into composite parts. Christ reveals the wholeness of God for in Christ “the fullness of deity was pleased to dwell” (Colossians 1:19, NRSV). Scott writes: “Christ as the revealer is not a being that is one or two steps removed from God. This is God with us” (ibid., 134). This union is at the very heart of what Torrance strives to preserve not only in his baptismal theology but in the whole of his theological construct arguing: “If that relation in being and agency is cut, then the whole of the Gospel of saving mediation between God and man collapses” (Torrance, 1992, as cited in Scott, 134). This conviction proved central to Torrance’s theology of baptism.

Similarly, Torrance teaches that in the *hypostatic union* of Christ there is a union of humanity and divinity in the person of Jesus and that “the humanity of Christ cannot be understood properly apart from the hypostatic union of God and man” (Scott, 136). Our knowledge of God in Christ is dependent on our knowledge of Christ in God, but Christ mediates the knowledge of God to us in this way. Christ as God is revealer and Christ as human is knower. This is to say that as God Christ both reveals and knows on our behalf for only God can fully reveal and only God in humanity can fully know. It is a mediated knowledge in which the finite creatures who cannot fully know the revelation of God know and are fully known by God in Christ, the God-man (1 Corinthians 13:12). Christ does what cannot be done in humanity alone by offering a vicarious response on behalf of humanity. “Christ is our vicarious knower: he knows for humanity” (Scott, 138). Scott continues in the same vein: “Torrance presents Christ as having vicariously fulfilled everything for humanity...humanity in a sense has nothing to offer or can offer nothing to God. Christ is the vicarious human response to God” (ibid., 139). As our vicarious response to God there is nothing in baptism that can be done or needs to be done by the human recipient for all is accomplished vicariously in Christ. This is undoubtedly most visible in the infant who “participates” in his baptism only as a receiver and even then, not in an active way but as one who receives only passively. All is accomplished on his behalf quite apart from his involvement. But what of human participation, particularly in the case of a responsible adult for whom baptism gives the appearance of active, conscious, deliberate participation?

Scott proceeds to address that question with a lengthy discussion of three types of union between God and man arguing that Torrance understood justification in ontological terms “not just that righteousness is imputed but rather that a participation in the righteousness of

Christ takes place. This is transferred through union with Christ” (ibid., 141). Once again there is Torrance’s insistence on the unity of Christ’s work and his person. Justification and righteousness are not *imparted* as if they were separate from Christ’s person.

Justification is *participation* in Christ through union. It is then a conversion that must take place for a new person to appropriate Christ (ibid., 143). But what sort of conversion? It is a decision for Christ that is a decision that Christ has already made on our behalf: “a decision about a decision” (ibid., 144) This is in turn a decision that cannot be made without the aid of the Holy Spirit. It is “an act of obedience to Christ who has already made a decision on my behalf in his obedience to God on the cross” (Torrance, 2009, as cited in Scott, 144).

Baptisma is both what the church does in baptism (the subjective baptism) and more importantly what God has done and is continually doing on our behalf in the baptism of Jesus (the objective baptism), a vicarious baptism (Scott, 78). Torrance writes that when the concept of *baptisma* is grasped then:

We find it (baptism) 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, and must be kept in focus in our understanding of it (Torrance, 1975, 84, as cited in Scott, 78).

It is to Christ’s vicarious baptism that we are joined in our own baptism. We are joined to Christ’s sufferings in baptism, blessed with his victory over death in baptism and united with him in life and death. Christ’s baptism, death, resurrection and life are not things apart from his essential identity. Torrance argues they are one with his whole life and person. Because *Baptisma* rests on the *homoousion* and the *hypostatic union* one cannot separate Christ from his works nor can one separate Christ in his person from Christ in his work in our baptism through his one vicarious baptism. Arguing that the sacrament is a visible testament of an invisible grace creates a duality not only between heaven and earth, but between Christ and his works. According to Torrance, the incarnation transcends any division between Christ and his works and between the sacrament and its effected benefit. They are one in the same and Christ is one with his works. It is a Christmas theology rather than an Easter theology and draws the focus in baptism back from the crucifixion to

include the whole of Christ's life grounded in the incarnation and not just in his vicarious sacrificial death (Scott, 171).

A major question for the purposes of this thesis is whether Torrance's incarnational paradigm necessitates the practice of infant baptism or merely indicates it as the most effective demonstration. Torrance certainly believed the former (*ibid.*, 2) but Scott writes that: "With minor adjustments everything that Torrance said could be applied to discipleship baptism" (*ibid.*, 215). Scott does not write with the polemic intention of advocating one practice over another and says little more on the subject but simply makes the observation as an avenue towards bringing Torrance's unique contributions to bear on more traditional Reformed theologies of baptism. Torrance's practical theology is summed up with a word about the role of the individual in baptism. "Humanity in a sense has nothing to offer or can offer nothing to God. Christ is the vicarious human response to God," (*ibid.*, 139). In other words, in Torrance's view there is no active way to receive the sacrament and the baptizand must be entirely passive in the baptismal event. This is in stark contrast to Torrance's former teacher, Karl Barth who argued that infant baptism in particular "obscures the freedom and responsibility of the person baptized, [contending] that this practice amounts to treating the baptizand as a mere passive object rather than an active partner in the covenant of grace" (Migliore, 1999, 497-498, as cited in Scott, 52). That one should approach baptism with "freedom and responsibility" as a "partner in the covenant" is to make infant baptism an impossibility. Given such a division between Torrance and one of the most articulate Reformed critics of infant baptism it is difficult to imagine that "minor adjustments" in Torrance's theology would suffice to make it practical for adult baptism.

In the end, the question about infant or adult baptism becomes one of baptismal validity, an argument that Scott suggests has enervated the practice of baptism in the Church (Schmemmann, 1976, as cited in Scott, 3). Additionally, it introduces an unnecessary duality in baptism: infant or adult. Does the function of baptism change according to the age of the recipient? Does it effect something different in a child who cannot respond in faith than in an adult who can? Torrance advocates a completely passive reception of baptismal grace and I see no reason to disallow his baptismal paradigm in adults. While his theology may be most visibly conveyed in infant baptism but with proper teaching the same can be revealed in adult baptism. An adult candidate certainly does make a profession and consciously receives the gift of union in Christ but his doing so adds nothing to the

sacrament itself. It merely takes God's grace the next step forward into a living faith. This is the hope of the church in every baptised person. A positive reception in baptism does not change baptism in any way, baptism remains baptism irrespective of the response in the individual. A baptised person remains the passive recipient of a gift she can never earn or compel God to provide; this is union with God in Christ. In baptism we are vicariously joined to the baptism of Christ's whole life.

A Constructive Paradigm?

There is a beauty to Torrance's [baptismal] paradigm and once mastered the intellectual rigour involved in understanding how that paradigm fits together adds to the enjoyment and a sense of wonder at its coherence and beauty (Scott, 182).

Many have noted how difficult Torrance is to read and to grasp, so while his style of presentation relates one doctrine to another his style does not create a good learning experience for the reader (ibid., 191).

John Scott provides a far more comprehensive look at Torrance's theology of baptism than this short summary allows. He examines the historic and contextual influences that shaped his early thoughts on baptism, followed by an extended discussion of his baptismal theology and a review of the work of the Special Commission. Scott writes with the intention of explicating Torrance's incarnational theology of baptism in light of the more traditional arguments for infant baptism as found in contemporary proponents of the Westminster covenantal model of baptism. His thesis is an effort to highlight those aspects of Torrance's theology that offer a substantive contribution to traditional arguments by drawing attention to what Scott describes as "neglected areas" of Reformed baptismal theology, a subject for which Scott draws heavily on Torrance's New College Lectures, entitled *A Neglected Aspect of the Doctrine of Baptism*. Scott argues that Torrance consistently strove to "reset the attention of baptism in the person and work of Christ" (ibid., 215) and that his work on baptism has the capacity to "reinvigorate other theologies to give attention to doctrines like the Trinity, the incarnation, union with Christ, the sacrament of the Lord's supper and the meaning of baptism" (ibid., 220). There is an obvious strain in Scott's writing as he wrestles with whether Torrance's work deserves more attention than it has to date. In the end he affirms that it does. Scott is not an

unqualified proponent of Torrance's work, citing his dense, often repetitive writing style and his overly-creative manner of justifying his arguments by way of vague reference to the Church Fathers (*ibid.*, 145). He is not alone amongst Torrance's critics (Wright, 2007, 44) but he is clearly an admirer of one who so effectively influenced the work of a major ecclesiastical commission over such a long period of time (Scott, 128) and developed a baptismal theology that attempted to address both the practical problems of the local presbyteries and the burgeoning ecumenical and liturgical renewal movements of the day. Scott argues that Torrance succeeded in neither venture and has subsequently been ignored in the main on this important topic (*ibid.*, 193). By bringing Torrance's unique perspective to light and recovering some of his work from the obscurity of the Reports of the General Assembly (1953-1963) Scott hopes to reinvigorate the Reformed debate on baptism and recover the meaning of baptism, especially within the Reformed tradition and among exponents of Westminster theology.

Morrison on Torrance

Ruth Morrison offers a second contribution to a revived discussion of Torrance's theology of baptism. Unlike Scott, whose express intention was to elucidate Torrance's baptismal theology, Morrison's thesis focuses particularly on Torrance's work as convener of the Special Commission on Baptism. She addresses Torrance's baptismal theology in her opening chapter, but the bulk of her thesis is an historical survey of the work of the Special Commission as found not only in the annual reports of the General Assembly and the respective verbatim minutes but also through the minutes of the Special Commission meetings. She attempts to frame that work in comparison with the more traditional Reformed theologies of baptism as expressed in the covenantal and sacramental frameworks with the aim of assessing whether the Commission under Torrance's leadership was faithful to the wider Reformed dialogue on baptism. Like Scott, she summarizes the baptismal debate in the Church of Scotland and the ecumenical front from 1963 to the present and offers some brief thought on ways forward in light of the watershed decisions of 2003. Morrison's work raises questions about discipleship and ethics, especially in the post-baptismal life into which we are initiated in baptism. She writes:

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 (ibid., 31).

Baptism without a call for any ethical outworking, whether in the immediacy of an adult baptism or as a latent expectation in an infant baptism is inherently problematic. There is a dualism between what happens in the act of baptism and what happens at the conclusion of the baptismal liturgy. In spite of his lengthy arguments to the contrary, baptism, as *baptisma* remains a spiritual event with no necessary practical outworking. There is the inward spiritual life of the baptised person but no necessary ethical transformation in the life of the individual. Torrance argues that *baptisma* is an objective event but how is that manifested in the life of the baptised? How does one carry the knowledge of his union with Christ into the home and workplace? The ethical outworking of baptism does not improve on one's baptism in any way, but one does not exist forever as a passive recipient of a union with One who has decided on his or her behalf. Sooner or later an individual must become active *participant* in the ongoing work of Christ in her life. Torrance was not unaware of this expectation or the necessary connection between baptism and ethics. In the 1955 Report of the Special Commission he wrote:

Baptism requires the response of faith, and a whole life of faith, for we cannot be saved without faith; yet Baptism tells us that it is not our faith that saves us, but Christ Himself alone (Report to the General Assembly 1955, 626, as cited in Spinks, 1996, 222 as cited in Morrison, 222).

His intention was to remove any doubt about the necessity of faith for the efficacy of baptism. Baptism, for Torrance and the Special Commission was solely and entirely the work of Christ and our union in his incarnation. As Spinks writes:

Baptism is also into the Name. This means that baptism is into the sphere where the mighty acts of God in the incarnation, birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension are operative for our salvation (Spinks, 1996, 221-2).

Baptism has nothing to do with an act of the individual and everything to do with the act of God in Christ. "Baptism is not a sacrament of our repentance, nor our faith, but of God's adoption and His promise of the Spirit" (ibid.). While the response of the individual

follows on from baptism, it has no part in the sacrament itself. It is perhaps Torrance's heavy emphasis on the completed work of God in baptism and the necessary passivity of the recipient that creates the impression that the individual is a virtual spectator at his/her baptism and not a participant.

Morrison goes on to relate the influence of Karl Barth on Torrance. There were many points of agreement between them. "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 nature, and the conviction that baptism should be administered within the worshipping community" (Morrison, 31-32). However, a fundamental distinction remained in their respective understanding of Spirit and water baptism. Torrance argued for their inseparable nature, while Barth placed a distinction between them, in fact a distinction so great that, for Barth baptism itself ceased to hold any sacramental value and served only as an external witness (Barth, 1981). Unlike Torrance, Barth placed a heavy emphasis on "the responsibility and task of the baptised." Morrison writes: "The vocational and ethical outworking of baptism becomes central to Barth's baptismal theology. Spirit baptism, he argued, liberated the baptised for 'Christian and churchly responsibility' (Barth, 1981, as cited in Morrison, 34), while the moment of water baptism reflected the simple reality of "entering the Christian community" (Morrison, 34). For Barth, baptism was merely a sign and an indicator of what had already transpired and would continue to transpire in the life of the baptised. While the human response was not a prerequisite for baptism, the act of baptism still required "a human response to reach its fulfilment" (ibid.). Instead of positively affecting anything in the baptismal moment water baptism merely serves as a sign of conversion. Barth argued that baptism was little more than a pledge of filial loyalty to the One in whose name a person is baptised. In agreement with the Reformed tradition, Torrance argued that baptism was less than sacramental regeneration (*ex opere operato*), but more than purely symbolic. It was instrumental in that it reflected, or enacted a holy mystery. But, unlike his Reformed predecessors, Torrance defined the baptismal moment not as a washing, or rebirth, closely aligned with Christ's atoning death and resurrection, and especially covenantal language (ibid., 38), but rather as a union into Christ's one vicarious baptism for all, the *baptisma* (ibid., 12). It was a union not only to Christ in his death but to his whole life, beginning with his birth, inclusive of his atoning sacrifice and looking forward to the outpouring of His Spirit at Pentecost. Again, the effect of Torrance's understanding of the *homoousion* and the *hypostatic union* necessitated that Christ not be divided from his works. Baptism was not a

work of Christ in the life of the individual, but a *union* with Christ. This was something new for which Torrance found few allies (Scott, 2015, 128), and for which Morrison argues he strayed beyond the traditional Reformed understanding of baptism.

Four Perennial Questions

Scott's thesis is dedicated to the singular task of clearly presenting the respective baptismal theologies of those who represent the Westminster tradition,⁵ and that of T.F. Torrance. His aim is to consider the possibility of some reconciliation or synthesis of what appear to be two opposing views on the subject. Scott bemoans the fact that "There is no real dialogue taking place between Torrance's followers and Westminster theologians" (Scott, 2015, 213). He concedes that reconciliation, much less synthesis, is unrealistic due to the fact that both Torrance and Westminster are guilty of arguing with caricatures of one another instead of addressing arguments in the main (*ibid.*). He contends that both are impoverished as a result. However, it is nonetheless important to consider Torrance's baptismal theology alongside those who represent a more traditional approach to understanding the sacrament. Scott does so by considering four recurring questions related to baptismal theology, addressing each one in turn by reflecting on the respective answers provided by Westminster and Torrance. His aim is to "test the competence" (*ibid.*, 197) of the respective baptismal paradigms. His method provides for a lively reading. In the pages that follow I will summarise his dialogue with a view to developing a working understanding of Reformed baptismal theology for the remainder of this thesis.

Scott outlines the questions as follows:

1. What is the link between faith and baptism?
2. What is the link between regeneration and baptism?
3. What presumptions, if any, are made with regard to the baptised infant?
4. What value does the baptism of someone who turns away from the faith in later life have? (*ibid.*).

⁵ As examples of the Westminster tradition Scott references the work of Bavinck (2006, 2008), Bannerman (1974), Calvin (1960), Cunningham (1991), Kline (1967), Leahy (1992), Marcel (1953), Schenck (2003) and others.

1. What is the link between faith and baptism?

Torrance advocated that baptism was full and complete in Christ alone and that nothing could be added or taken away from the sacrament by any act on the part of the Church or the individual. Torrance answers quite simply that “baptism is an objective act of God in Jesus Christ” (ibid., 197) and that any faith required for the sacrament is provided in its entirety by Christ himself (ibid., 198). This is to say that there is no necessary link between faith and baptism. The duality of the question itself betrays a misunderstanding of Torrance’s essential paradigm which references the fundamental unity of Christ and Christ’s work. Scott writes that Westminster theologians would agree with Torrance, concurring with his argument that “faith is a gift of God (ibid., 198). Similarly, they would agree that baptism is God’s work and not humanity’s.

God is the Baptizer; ultimately, He may use the minister and the water as his agents, but it is the Spirit that does the work. God offers Christ and applies Christ through the instrument of baptism (ibid.).

But saying that faith is a *gift* of God and saying that faith is *provided* by God in Christ are not necessarily the same thing. It depends upon the locus of that faith. For Torrance, the locus is entirely in Christ but for Westminster the locus is shared between God and the baptised person. Faith is a gift of God but it is a gift that is placed into a human heart inviting the recipient to revel in the receiving of the gift. In other words, the recipient retains a measure of volition and personal responsibility. Torrance would argue that the sacrament is efficacious regardless of the individual’s faith, for it is not the individual’s faith that is in question, but rather Christ’s faith. Just as it was for Barth, so it is for Torrance: the baptised is simply acknowledging what has already transpired on his/her behalf (ibid.). Calvin argued that an individual’s faith played a far more substantive role and that the Word of God and the sacraments “avail and profit nothing unless received in faith” (*Institutes* IV.14.7, as cited in Scott, 199). Scott writes:

Faith is a gift of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit the person is made willing and responds by faith. This exercise of faith can be some time after the baptism. When there is not the response of faith, then the rite of baptism was not a true sacrament (ibid.).

The sacrament represents a unique interplay between God and the individual in the power of the Holy Spirit. Volition and responsibility are assumed as essential to sacramental efficacy but the response of faith may not come at the time of baptism. In fact, it may come much later, laying the foundation for the Westminster justification of infant baptism. Typically, the pattern for the development of baptismal theology begins with a general theology of the sacraments, then moving to the reception of those sacraments by a responsible adult, as is the case with Calvin (*ibid.*) who argues that the sacraments are preceded with the promise of God as proclaimed in the preaching of the Word. The sacraments serve as an aid to faith and assurance of the veracity of the expressed promise. The sacraments ground the promise in the material elements of human existence: water, bread and wine. However, the sacraments are for the believer and find fertile ground in the hearts of the faithful whether at the time of the baptism or many years later. Scott writes of Calvin:

The development of the argument assumes one who is of sufficient age and ability to exercise faith and to have a cognitive understanding of the promises made (*ibid.*, 200).

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are for responsible adult believers, individuals who, under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, are able to both hear and respond in faith to the promises explicated in Word, which of course raises a problem for infant baptism. As regards baptismal recipients Scott quotes Cunningham:

When the subject of the sacraments in general...is under consideration...it is adult participation only which theologians have ordinarily in view (Cunningham, 1991, 125, as cited in Scott, 200).

Westminster theologians are then left with the problem of how to justify the practice of infant baptism, a problem I will address below under Scott's third question.

2. What is the link between regeneration and baptism?

In his second question to Torrance and Westminster, Scott asks about the relationship between regeneration and baptism. He writes that Torrance would raise the central issue of dualism and argue that the question itself is misleading. However, Scott argues that:

Torrance tends to use this criticism in a rather general way and at times this blunt instrument leads to a dismissal of questions and objections and prevents any further engagement (Scott, 202).

According to Scott, in the Westminster tradition there is a close link between baptism and regeneration:

This is where the Holy Spirit sovereignly works in the passive person. The work of redemption, an event accomplished in history, is now applied to the person (ibid., 202).

Torrance's argues that in baptism the benefits of regeneration are not so much "applied" as they are "actualised." But Scott retorts:

Changing the terminology and treating the human response as already accomplished in Christ still leaves Torrance's theology having to account for how salvation is not just something done outside a person (ibid., 202).

Torrance leaves open the question of how regeneration transpires in the individual and his determined focus on the "vicarious sacrifice" of Jesus gives the impression that regeneration is also accomplished by Christ "outside a person," which raises a more fundamental question of the role played by the individual.

3. What presumptions, if any, are made with regard to the baptised infant?

From here, Scott moves to the question of infant baptism and baptismal faith. For Torrance it is the question itself that is misleading, for it implies that the faith of the individual has some inherent role to play. But baptism for Torrance is an objective focus on Christ, not the individual (ibid., 203). For Westminster however, the question is largely resolved by referencing God's covenant of grace:

Virtually all Westminster theologians agree that the infant of a believing parent is a child of the covenant of grace and that the child should receive the sign and seal of the covenant (ibid.).

Scott suggests that while there is broad agreement about the importance of covenantal theology, authors differ as to the “spiritual status of the infant” (ibid., 203). Some (Leahy, 1992, 31) suggest that baptismal regeneration transpires later in life and that children are not to be treated as believers until they grow up and embrace the promises made on their behalf at baptism. Others (Schenck, 2003) argue the opposite and believe that baptised children be considered under the rubric of “presumptive generation” and not be thought of as candidates for evangelistic outreach (Scott, 204).

4. What value does the baptism of someone who turns away from the faith later in life have?

Finally, Scott address the important question of the value of baptism for those who “turn away from faith later in life.” This question is one of particular interest for this thesis as it is directly referenced in the 2003 Report when the Panel reflects upon the fact that:

What cannot be doubted is that the Scottish population includes 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 outwith the church. If infant baptism is so ineffective, so the argument goes, whether spoken or unspoken, it can hardly be highly significant (RGA 2003, 13/4, section 1.3.1.8).

According to Scott:

This is a question that would not arise in Torrance’s theology of baptism. That a baptised child would not continue in the faith is as irrational as evil and therefore a question that cannot be addressed (Scott, 205).

Westminster would respond by saying that:

The person who turned away from the faith is not of the elect, and therefore did not receive the sacrament of baptism, but merely the outward rite (Marcel, 1953, 136, as cited in Scott, 205).

However, there is another train of thought influenced by the work of Kline (1967) in which:

The person who continues in the faith receives the blessings of the covenant and the person who turns away is a covenant breaker and is subject to the curse of the covenant (Scott, 205).

It is not Scott's intention to resolve the difficulties presented by so many differing voices on the intricacies of baptismal theology. Rather, he seeks to present a cogent picture of the paradigms unique to the Westminster tradition and to Torrance with the aim of considering the possibility of some synthesis of the two. In the end he concedes that a synthesis is not possible (ibid., 206). His discussion is however useful for placing Torrance's baptismal theology within the wider context of traditional Reformed arguments. Having done so it is not difficult to accept Morrison's conclusion that Torrance strayed beyond the bounds of Reformed theology, nor Scott's conclusion that he exceeded the General Assembly's original remit of clarifying who was eligible for baptism. Instead Torrance took the opportunity to develop and expound a new paradigm of Christ's One vicarious baptism for the Church. As evidenced in Scott's thesis there has been little uptake of Torrance's novel concepts. However, as of the writing of this thesis the Special Commission Reports to the General Assembly have been digitized and uploaded in their entirety to the Internet and are now available to the wider public for the first time since they were written over sixty years ago. Perhaps with the publication of the two Ph.D. theses referenced in this chapter and with the (hopeful!) publication of my own there will be a revived interest in the doctrine of baptism as it has been revisited in the Church of Scotland in the latter half of the 20th century.

CHAPTER THREE

The Development of the 2003 Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly

As stated in the previous chapter the 2003 Panel on Doctrine Report to the General Assembly offered a number of recommendations that departed in substantive ways from the preceding Reports of the Special Commission on Baptism. Most prominent was the move away from the practice of infant baptism and the highlighting of baptism upon personal profession of faith and household baptism as the normative witness of the New Testament. Additionally, the Panel recommended the development of a service of “Thanksgiving for, and Blessing of” the children of those parents who could not in good conscience commit themselves to the Kirk’s baptismal vows. Provision was made for the baptism of individuals with learning difficulties and the Panel broadened considerably the standards of baptismal eligibility. The Special Commission required that those bringing children for baptism must be “communicant members” of the church, but the Panel on Doctrine relaxed those standards and allowed that a child could be brought for baptism by some other sponsor for whom faith and church commitment were more obvious and satisfactory to ministers and Kirk Sessions. In practice the new recommendations relieved greatly the difficulties faced by many parents and ministers caused by the stringent requirements of Act XVII 1963. The Working Party on Baptism¹ (henceforth referred to as the Panel on Doctrine) was formed at the instigation of the 1999 General Assembly in response to the work and the report of the Committee on Mission and Evangelism Resources (MERC) who had recently completed a review and survey of baptismal practice entitled the Report on Infant Baptism and Mission and Evangelism in the Church of Scotland: 1963-1997. The MERC report originated with a request of the 1997 Assembly following debate engendered by the Report of the Board of National Mission. The MERC Report was carried out by means of a series of surveys issued to the Church.² It was not

¹ Original membership of the Committee included: John McPake (Convener), Roger Bland, Mary Cranfield, Joe Kavanagh, Kenneth Walker and David Wright, with four additional members from the Board of National Mission: Frank Bardgett, Rob McAlpine, Alex Millar and Kenneth Stott.

² Surveys were issued to: Presbytery Clerks; Parish, Associate, Auxiliary Ministers and full-time Chaplains; Kirk Sessions; Church of Scotland members; and the opinions of the general public on the subject of Baptism. It also utilized the services of Novum and Special Mission Trusts, the professional support of Christian Research (directed by Dr Peter Brierly), and was guided by the counsel of the Social Policy Department of the University of Edinburgh, under the direction of Dr A. Robertson.

intended to generate policy or undergird doctrine but rather served as an indicator of how that policy and doctrine is experienced and perceived in the community and the Church. The survey revealed substantive questions that the Panel on Doctrine were forced to consider. It revealed a wide spectrum of baptismal beliefs without the church and a similarly wide spectrum of baptismal practice within the church. It left no doubt that a new statement on baptism was necessary for the church, and the Panel on Doctrine effectively provided just such a statement with its own *Doctrine of Baptism* in 2003. But their Report remains an unfinished work. The follow-on “Basis of Instruction” called for in its deliverance has never been developed and, beyond the new eligibility requirements the substance of the report has never moved beyond the pages of the 2003 Report to the General Assembly. There has been no practical development of those key understandings and in consequence they have been largely forgotten or remain unknown to the Church at large.

In this chapter I will revisit the development of that important Report by considering two resources. The first is a notebook collated over the four-year period (1999-2003) in which the Working Party on Baptism considered its task. It is a notebook compiled by the Rev Dr Douglas Galbraith who served as Secretary to the Panel on Worship and Doctrine from 1996-2005. Dr Galbraith assiduously collected a wide variety of documents that included the Agenda and Minutes of the various meetings of the Working Party, emails exchanged amongst members and interested outside parties, unpublished documents from the World Council of Churches and ecumenical partners, handwritten notes in which the voice of now deceased members of the Working Party are clearly heard,³ articles clipped from a variety of papers on the day following the historic decision of the Assembly, as well as numerous other documents of interest.⁴ The second resource is an interview I conducted with the Rev Dr John McPake who served as Convener of the Panel on Doctrine from 1999-2004 and who personally convened the Working Party on Baptism. He was the primary author and editor of the 2002-2003 Reports. In addition to an engaging discussion about the Working Party, Dr McPake was kind enough to share his personal story of faith and service in the church beginning with his own baptism upon profession of faith.⁵ As will be seen in the following pages his story played a significant, if unacknowledged role in his

³ Specifically, those of Dr David Wright (1937-2008) whose presence on the Working Party was preceded by a long tenure on the Panel on Doctrine as a professorial representative of New College, Edinburgh, and whose interest and writings on the subject of baptism are well documented.

⁴ Dr Galbraith retrieved the notebook from the neglected and mouldering basement of 121 George Street, and graciously loaned it to me for the purposes of this thesis.

⁵ Dr McPake agreed to allow me the use of that interview for the purposes of my research.

Convenership of the Panel on Doctrine and his leadership of the Working Party on Baptism. In this chapter I will consider these resources first for their historic value, but second for their potential to serve as a foundation for the development of what I consider “Phase Two” of the 2003 Report: The development of a Basis of Instruction on Baptism. The failure to produce this document has profoundly limited the influence of the 2003 Report and has squandered the fine contribution made by the Panel on Doctrine to the life and work of the Church of Scotland.

The Rev Dr John McPake

Dr McPake brought to the convenership an interesting pedigree. He was not raised in the Church of Scotland, nor was he baptised as an infant, neither were his family practicing Christians. Instead, he came to faith in the Baptist Church where he attended with school friends. He described his journey to baptism:

As my own faith journey came into place, baptism was a significant component within that. I came to faith during my teenage years, I'd always had a belief in God, and no one had ever discouraged that kind of belief...so that was how the faith journey began... baptism came as a logical next step.

McPake had seen other baptisms prior to his own and in reflection described the Baptist practice as “a striking piece of imagery...symbolic...an enacted symbol.” Having received the benefit of baptismal preparatory classes he related the experience of his baptism:

I can remember it fairly clearly, it was a profoundly emotional experience, it was a sense of cleansing, a sense of being taken down into the waters, the biblical imagery of Romans 6 in particular, dying and rising with Christ, it was very tangible... sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ...this is what is occurring, it's a sharing in Christ's death and resurrection, that's powerful.

His recollection is vivid and well-articulated in terms of his “cleansing” and union with Christ in his death and resurrection. He was clear about what he was doing and what was being done by Christ on his behalf. Unlike infant baptism in which we can recall the event only second-hand, baptism upon profession of faith enabled McPake to own the experience

as a foundational moment of his own story. His commitment to faith clearly transpired before his baptism but there is no doubt that the event itself proved highly significant. His baptism was an act signifying an earlier event of personal conversion, but the sacrament had its own significance. It stands as an indelible marker in his own life, an unforgettable moment on his journey to service in the church. Understanding the baptismal moment was a journey that would lead him to the Reformed faith and service in the Church of Scotland.

McPake began training for ministry in the Baptist Church and subsequently moved from the Scottish Baptist College to Glasgow University where he was “introduced to a broader range of views.” It was during the tenure of John Zizoulas, a man whom McPake recalls as having “greatly influenced me in my own time and theological understanding...” At Glasgow McPake continued to reflect on his baptismal experience and shared that:

In the Baptist context, the emphasis was on your personal decision...this was *you doing something* to express outwardly what had occurred within. I certainly found that satisfactory in the early years and the more I think about it now it is less satisfactory as an account of what baptism is about.

His exposure to Reformed thought at Glasgow gave him a new vocabulary to describe his baptism in more Christocentric terms, ideas that resonated with a deep sense of his conviction that his baptism had more to do with Christ’s action than his own. It was a sense that would find validation in the Church of Scotland’s practice of infant baptism. In the course of his education, McPake felt himself gravitating to the Reformed faith and translated to the Church of Scotland upon completion of his degree. Having come from a tradition that practices baptism upon profession of faith exclusively I asked him how he reconciled himself to the Reformed tradition of infant baptism:

I embraced it without reservation. It goes back to our understanding of what is taking place in baptism...baptism rests not on my faith, but on the faithfulness of God. The baptism which I'd understood depended on what I did. I reversed completely on that...it is utterly dependent on what God has done in Christ, and my response to that was secondary to what had primarily been done by God in Christ for me.

McPake is careful with his words and eschews the practice of associating baptism with a qualifying adjective: infant or adult. In spite of the differences in practice between his own experience and that of the Church of Scotland, McPake makes no distinction between the two. He argues simply that “baptism is baptism.” When I asked him about when he came to that conclusion he said it was the Church of Scotland baptismal liturgy that convinced him of the need to describe baptism in plain terms:

The baptismal liturgies within the Church of Scotland are pretty powerful stuff...and they're about baptism, and not about infant baptism or adult baptism, *baptism means baptism*.

Calvin is often criticized for developing two baptismal theologies: one for baptism generally and a second for the baptism of infants (Barth, 1981, 169). Where there is certainly a broad area of overlap, he creates the impression of a difference in the two, as if one did something that the other did not. In particular Calvin places a heavy emphasis on infant baptism as a sign of the Covenant, a consequence of the “polemical context from which it offered” rather than out of any theological “inner necessity” (ibid, 4). For McPake this was unsatisfactory and latterly he found justification for that view in the pages of the New Testament. When I asked him about baptism as sign of God’s covenant promise and the absence of any reference to that promise in the 2003 Report, he simply said: “the 2003 Reports make as much use of covenant as the New Testament does,” This is to say, none at all.⁶

It was with this background that McPake came to the Convenorship of the Panel on Doctrine: a profound personal experience of baptism upon profession of faith, a deep sense of the tangible, almost visceral sharing with Christ’s death and resurrection in baptism, a growing awareness that baptism had more to do with the work of God than with the individual, and that Christ’s work was the same whether the baptizand were infant or adult, that baptism was baptism. McPake had high view of both the wonder of the baptismal encounter and the beauty of its descriptive theology in the Reformed tradition.

⁶ Paul links the idea of baptism to circumcision in Colossians 2:11-12, likening our ‘baptism’ into Christ’s death and resurrection as being like a ‘spiritual circumcision.’ In its *Doctrine of Baptism*, the Panel briefly addressed this connection but, clearly McPake felt it did not justify a fully developed theology of Covenant.

Dr McPake and the Notebook

The Working Party notebook begins with a copy of both the 2002 and 2003 Reports to the General Assembly.⁷ These two documents provide an excellent summary of the work done over the four-year period of 1999-2003. They are a matter of public record and are a worthy source of information for the beginning of Phase Two. However, I will address the remainder of that important notebook in the following pages. The Committee was comprised of members nominated by the Assembly plus four representatives from the Board of National Missions. The initial mailing to the committee from Secretary Galbraith from 12 August 1999 included the full report of the National mission working party's report with sections that went beyond the version included in the General Assembly's "Blue Book." Additionally, there was a paper on the subject of infant baptism that was initially prepared for the National Missions committee and revised by the Urban Priorities Area Committee Theology Group. Finally, there was a response to that paper prepared by David Wright. Wright is credited in this first letter with resolving the final wording of the Working Party's remit. It read:

Remit the Report on Infant Baptism and Mission and Evangelism in the Church of Scotland: 1963-1997 to the Panel on Doctrine for consideration with the Committee on Mission and Evangelism Resources (MERC) *in light of the wider recent theological reflection on baptism* with a request that a Report be made to a future General Assembly (italics in original).

The secretary, Dr Galbraith italicized the text indicating that while the MERC Report was at the heart of the remit, it was not to be considered in isolation but rather as a feature of the wider context. The direction of the Panel's work was already moving outwards from the immediate practical concerns of the Church of Scotland and into a dialogue with the ecumenical community. There was considerable work already done on the subject of baptism by profession of faith (e.g. Best, Heller, 1997; Beasley-Murray, 1962) and under Wright's influence the Panel would be considering it in depth. The minutes of the Panel's

⁷ When I received the notebook, the contents were simply gathered together but had no particular order. I took the liberty of arranging the documents chronologically and made effort to follow the Agenda and Minutes with the relevant documents addressed in those respective meetings. This is followed by a section that includes the wide-ranging correspondence the Party had with ecumenical partners. These are also arranged in chronological order. The newspaper clippings are collected at the close of the notebook.

first meeting⁸ are similarly indicative of the questions they would consider and the directions their work would take. Even at this early stage the outline of the final Report was taking shape. Under matters discussed, Dr Galbraith records a variety of subjects including: the discrepancy between the theology of grace in the Special Commission Report and the outcome as expressed in the restrictions of the Act of 1963; the apparent absence within the Church of Scotland of the influence of Barth's writings on baptism; the high proportion of individuals baptised as infants in the Church of Scotland who have not subsequently come into the church; the development of thanksgiving services in the Church of England; the concern about discrimination against "those who are less articulate;" the "massive baptismal reductionism" (Wright, 2001) effected by the practice of infant baptism; and the acknowledgement that "this may not be an inevitable function of infant baptism but a failing on the part of the church." The work of the Special Commission was being seriously questioned, the need for a more flexible statement of baptismal eligibility was clear, the Church of Scotland was out of step with the ecumenical community on the subject of baptism and there was an awareness that baptism, taken in isolation from the support of the church community expressed an impoverished ecclesiology. All of these subjects found their way into the 2003 Report and it seems from this early meeting that a recommendation highlighting the New Testament priority of baptism upon profession of faith was highly likely if not inevitable.

McPake on Torrance

Given that the work of the Special Commission was of paramount importance to the Panel, I asked McPake: "How familiar were you and your cohorts with the Special Commission's work prior to beginning?"

McPake: Pretty well versed!

McPake related to me that Torrance had been the primary subject of his own Ph.D. (McPake, 1991), and that, while the Special Commission on Baptism was not his primary focus he was nonetheless familiar with it. The wider church however knew it more for its stringent baptismal requirements than for its actual theology. As McPake stated: it was

⁸ The first meeting of the Panel was held on 25 August 1999 at the offices of 121 George Street.

“honoured by the many unread.” Like Scott who argued that the Special Commission Reports were an unreferenced resource amongst Reformed scholars, McPake suggests that even within the Church of Scotland it was an unknown quantity. Perhaps in part due to Torrance’s unique status as a leading theologian in the Church of Scotland, the Special Commission Report nonetheless retained a remarkable hold on the wider church. Even with the conclusion of the MERC Report there was no suggestion that the 1963 Act needed a change. McPake credited it for its historical breadth and for its lasting influence and said:

It was an enormous contribution to the life of the Church...and had been taken as axiomatic for a generation.

Theologically it was well grounded and McPake was quick to point that it resonated with his own experience of baptism and his conception of the theological underpinnings to the practice:

The undergirding theology is very powerful in Torrance and that’s something I would own to...it is what Christ has done, that we...are wholly reliant on, that’s where I ground my own faith, and in one sense that provides a strong basis for Torrance’s approach.

But McPake stops short of endorsing the Report as a whole based largely on the Special Commission’s handling of New Testament exegesis:

The problem is that the New Testament evidence doesn’t really fit, so there’s a strong theology...but...it’s undermined by its handling of the New Testament evidence.

Similarly, he stated earlier in the conversation:

I just think the New Testament exegesis that undergirds the Special Commission just doesn’t stand, and that neither literally nor figuratively.

It was Torrance’s insistence that infant baptism was and always has been the practice of the church that McPake found so disagreeable. McPake suggested there were two

influences that may have affected Torrance's conclusions. The first was Torrance's theological methodology and the second was the historic practice of infant baptism in the Church of Scotland. McPake argues that Torrance often brought his own theological paradigm to his subject matters:

It's an interesting feature of Torrance's approach, actually to a whole range, whether it's Scottish theology, whether it's science, whether it's the theology of Karl Barth, or of H.R. Mackintosh, his predecessor at New College, there's a methodology that's discernible, there's a framework that gives an interpretive shape to everything that follows thereafter, and if the shape is faithful to the subject, then it works! But, just occasionally you think the predetermined shape...can have a distorting effect.

He argues that Torrance was influenced by his own theological predilections and that his conception of the "vicarious humanity of Christ" (McPake, 2016, 914-917) led to his erroneous conclusions about the significance of *baptisma* in the New Testament. McPake stated plainly that Torrance's "use of *baptisma* is just problematic and is non-defensible." McPake argued that it was a case of theology influencing the reading of scripture rather than scripture influencing the writing of theology.

The second influence affecting the outcome of the Special Commission Report on infant baptism was the baptismal practice of the Church of Scotland at the time of its writing. This was a subtle influence and one never consciously acknowledged by the Commission, but McPake suggests it may have been a case of theology justifying practice:

Torrance's writings, the Special Commission, coincides with the height of the Church of Scotland's influence in the 20th century and...numbers attending church in the late 1950's in the post-war period reach heights which I ... fear we'll never see again. And...very large numbers of children were being baptised at that point and being baptised within the Church of Scotland, *so the theology met the need*, and maybe that was not perceived at the time (italics mine).

At the height of its social influence in 1963 only one in ten baptisms were for professing adult believers. Infant baptism was the presumed norm and baptism by profession of faith was the exception. McPake simply reflected that:

It's just interesting that at that point in time in the Church of Scotland, as very, very large numbers of children were being baptised, the church provided a justification and rationale for that practice which was almost unvaryingly focused on infant baptism.

It is interesting indeed that the Special Commission focused exclusively on the practice of infant baptism. Whether it was their intention or not their decisions set the Church of Scotland further down a pathway already diverging from the ecumenical community of the Church and ultimately a pathway leading towards further internal diversity and ongoing external separation from the contemporary culture. Reflecting on the aftermath of the 1963 Act, McPake suggests that some thought the 1963 Act was actually a *causative* factor in the decline of the Church of Scotland. As outlined in Chapter One though, it is unlikely that any single decision or action of the church instigated its decline. The Church of Scotland is caught up in a milieu of complex social change but there can be little doubt that the restrictive nature of the 1963 requirements contributed to the sense of alienation that many Scottish parents felt about the Church. As McPake put it:

Has the baptismal theology enunciated in the Special Commission sustained the life of the Church of Scotland thereafter? And the answer to that is...that huge focus [on baptism] *did not animate the life of the church thereafter* (italics mine).

The Panel on Doctrine laboured ever with that failing in mind.

Urban Priority Areas and Hospital Chaplains

If there was pressure on the Special Commission in 1963 to preserve the status quo on infant baptism, there was no less pressure on the Working Party in 1999. While the ground had shifted considerably in the preceding forty years and the consensus on infant baptism and the conclusions of the Special Commission were “increasingly being questioned” (RGA 2003, 1.2.2, 13/2), there remained strong arguments in favour of retaining it as a primary witness of God’s gracious welcome and acceptance, particularly in Urban Priority Areas and amongst hospital Chaplaincies, both of which created unique problems and opportunities quite apart from the “norm” of baptism within the parish church. The Panel considered a document prepared by the UPA Committee Theology Group entitled “The Practice of Infant Baptism in UPA Parishes.” Confronting the issue of a baptismal request

from parents or family members who had little or no connection to the parish church, the authors of this paper argued that “non-involvement in church life doesn’t necessarily imply an absence of faith” which might be equally true in parishes across Scotland. But in UPA charges:

There is often a widespread feeling that the church is “not for the likes of us,” because of *cultural reasons, not religious reasons*.

The stigma of poverty is potentially aggravated by the church. This is often perceived in the same vein as many other institutions who have neglected or rejected the poor. Refusal of a baptismal request was all too easily perceived by individuals living in UPA parishes as an institutional rejection rather than a theological qualification. Pastoral care was often considered ahead of theological correctness:

For many working in UPA’s where low self-esteem and depression are often common-place, the pastoral instinct is to seek every opportunity to witness to the love and grace of God and the special place Jesus gave to the lost and the ‘outcast.’ This inclines toward a more open policy of infant baptism than the church expects.

Baptism provides UPA ministers the opportunity to make a pastoral connection that would otherwise be improbable. The Committee was cognizant of the need for a more substantive and genuine connection between the church and baptismal families and offered suggestions which included preparatory classes, thanksgiving or blessing services as a pastoral alternative to infant baptism and an enhanced role for the congregation to play in the sacrament. There is a clear line of connection between these suggestions and the final deliverance of the Panel in 2003.

The Panel considered a similar paper entitled “Baptism in Hospitals”⁹ which was based on a paper presented to the College of Health Care Chaplains. “Baptism in Hospitals” was also a response to the 1999 MERC Report. The Panel reflected on this at their meeting on 13 March 2000. Like their UPA cohorts, Hospital Chaplains were well informed about baptismal theology and the constraints of the 1963 Act. Their role in chaplaincy however presents the church with unique challenges. Robertson put the matter succinctly: “How

⁹ Written and presented by Blair Robertson, Southern General Hospital, November 1999. Mr. Robertson prepared a similar paper after the MERC Report entitled “A Response from Hospital Chaplains.”

does Church law, or Canon Law, or church polity, operate within a hospital?" A hospital chaplain regularly faces circumstances quite unique from those experienced by the parish minister. For example, how does a chaplain answer a request for the baptism of a still-born child? What does a chaplain do in the event of an "emergency baptism" when a child is not expected to live? How does a chaplain respond to the request for the baptism of an adult who is "comatose, unconscious or sedated?" These are questions that form the crucible of the Church's baptismal theology and practice. Where there is simply no time to reflect upon the profundities of our personal and corporate relationship to the sacramental moment, chaplains are often driven more by the immediate pastoral needs of the family than the overarching requirements of the Church. The temptation is to allow the pastoral demands to overwhelm the underlying theological convictions. Robertson argues that there is broad agreement amongst hospital chaplains that this does not necessitate irresponsible or promiscuous use of the baptismal waters, but there is wide diversity of practice amongst hospital chaplains.

McPake in extremis

The question of hospital baptism, especially *in extremis* baptism, was one that McPake was able to address from personal experience. He related to me that in his work as a parish minister he was once called upon to minister to a Catholic family whose new-born child was facing emergency surgery. In what proved to be the most heart-felt and emotionally evocative moment of my interview, McPake recalled the moment:

In the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, there was no one else there, so I poked my finger through [the incubator] and placed the tiniest spot of water on the child's head before they were rushed off to emergency surgery...five minutes later...the child would have been under the knife.

It was a profound and formative moment for McPake and was undoubtedly received by the family with deep gratitude. Questions about their faith and connection to the local church, their comprehension of the sacrament and the associated baptismal vows, and the ecclesiastical appropriateness of his service in lieu of a Roman Catholic priest paled in comparison to the pastoral urgency of the moment. In fact, such matters were so ancillary that they hardly warranted mention. But if such matters are ancillary in baptismal

emergencies are they also ancillary in less urgent circumstances? Ought we follow Phillip's example when he was asked by the Ethiopian eunuch "What is there to prevent me being baptised?" (Acts 8:26-40). Like the UPA ministers, we ought to ponder whether baptism is a sacrament of the Church or simply an act of pastoral care for anxious new parents and a "connection" with the local parish. In spite of the absence of any answers to the questions normally occasioned by a request for baptism and without any reference to the stipulations of Church law regarding baptismal eligibility, McPake had no hesitation to baptise:

When I performed baptism in an emergency situation, it was very, very real, this was the first and last act of the church that this child might...experience, other than a funeral! Thank God that wasn't the case. Profoundly witnessed, through the incubator, touching the child's forehead, immensely powerful, I remember it vividly.

The moment required no "baptismal reductionism" and there was no question for him but that the sacrament conveyed the substance of our faith and our theological convictions about its meaning:

It's the Good Shepherd who baptizes...and in a sense, whether it's a tiny child in an incubator, it is life and death and resurrection.

Whether conducted in the moment of crisis or under the auspices and care of the local church, baptism is baptism not because the practice falls neatly within the rubric of church Law but because it is an act of the Good Shepherd for which, as Torrance advocated we can *only* be passive recipients. Baptism is undoubtedly an act of pastoral care and in addition to their child receiving the sign of God's welcome, parents with whatever motives they have for choosing baptism, whatever preconceptions they have of its meaning, or whatever the measure of their commitment to their baptismal vows, will also receive in baptism the Good News of God's great acceptance of their child. But this act of pastoral care must always take a subordinate place to the act of Christ on our behalf in the sacrament itself. The Church doesn't do baptism as a *means* to providing pastoral care but pastoral care comes as a *result* of our sharing the sacrament in God's name. To confuse the two or to reverse their priority *is* to affect a "massive baptismal reductionism." It is to make baptism a human act instead of a divine one.

The arguments from the hospital chaplains were persuasive and in their 2003 Report the Panel made provision for their needs by including the brief phrase “In exceptional circumstances, baptism may be administered elsewhere (e.g. at home, in hospital).”¹⁰ And, at the Assembly itself when queried on the subject McPake referenced his own experience as an example to justify its inclusion. The Assembly passed the proposed amendment.

Ecumenical Influences and Baptismal *Ordo*

In their preparatory work the Panel considered a wide variety of ecumenical developments on the subject of baptism, chief among them, the World Council of Churches publications (World Council of Churches, 1982; Best, Heller, 1997). The summary conclusion of those studies was to consider “the placing of baptism with a wider context of Christian initiation” (RGA 2003, 1.3.2.2, 13/5). The Panel wrote:

BEM encouraged the view that there was perhaps no huge difference between two dominant patterns: infant baptism followed by Christian nurture leading to profession of faith in admission to communion (confirmation), and infant blessing/thanksgiving followed by Christian nurture leading to baptism on profession of faith (*ibid.*).

In other words, the Panel was beginning to realize that baptism itself was not the problem but rather a lack of baptismal context in the form of lifelong discipleship. While the language is not referenced specifically the Report alludes to the Latin word *ordo* (order, shape) used at length in the *Becoming a Christian* report (Best, Heller, 1997, section 1.6). *Ordo* refers to a pattern of inculturation, a model derived from the witness of scripture that was discerned and developed by the early church into an extended process of inculturation that included: formation in the faith through preaching and teaching, washing with water and the Spirit, participation in the Eucharist and life in the community (*ibid.*, section II.B.22, 5). Best and Heller argue in *Becoming a Christian* that:

¹⁰ See Appendix C of the Panel on Doctrine 2003 Report to the General Assembly, “Act Amending Act V, 2000 (Consolidating Act anent the Sacraments), section 7.

Inculturation, therefore, is the use of cultural means in order to express the meaning of worship in a way that helps people within a specific context to come to a clearer understanding, and experience, of the mystery of God's love. It is a way of growing in understanding" (ibid., III.28, 8).

In other words, the church recognized that baptism was the sacrament not only of initiation but *inculturation* into a way of life that would be lived within the baptised community. It was the *ordo* that effected and enabled the genuine and lasting transformation of the individual. "Baptism is not a punctiliar event, but a process of growth. The inculturation of baptism includes all stages of this process" (ibid., III.B.35, 36). Baptism was without question the high-water mark of the process, but it could not be approached nor properly practiced in isolation from the other features of the desired new life.

In reviewing *Becoming a Christian*, David Wright suggested to the Panel: "What is not explicitly acknowledged is that this *ordo*, derived from the early church, has in view the baptism of believers, not infants."¹¹ Wright implies that Best and Heller have accommodated the practice of inculturation to the prevalent reality of infant baptism in the church and suggests that the process has been consequently devalued or reduced in its original form. However, given the widespread practice of infant baptism it is difficult to imagine them doing anything *but* devising a way in which the *ordo* could be inclusive of infants. Doing so involves a creative application of the *ordo* process. Given that there are effectively three elements to the *ordo*: formation in faith, water baptism, and life in the community one is left to wonder if Best and Heller imagined those three elements could be applied in any order. For example, if an infant began her life with water baptism could she not then participate as a member of the community until such time that she was able to engage a formalized process of teaching? Or, could an adult not begin with life in the community then participate in the process of faith formation before receiving the sacrament or alternately receive the sacrament *then* the teaching? It is not the consecutive order that makes *ordo* effective but rather the inclusion of all three elements that makes life-long inculturation so effective and so important for genuine discipleship, and it is the absence of that intentional, wider process that raises a challenge for the church. Wright offered these words about *Becoming a Christian*:

¹¹ Unpublished comments addressed to the Working Party on Baptism, 30 January 1999.

The particular points of challenge to the Church of Scotland are “formation in faith” (the rediscovered catechumenate) and “incorporation into the life of the community.” It has been in part our large-scale failure in these that has led to the low view of baptism widespread among us (leading in turn to prodigality in administration, which fuels the vicious cycle of baptismal devaluation and baptism ineffectiveness).

It is not water baptism that is missing in the Church of Scotland but rather the lack of emphasis on the other two elements of inculturation that make baptism “ineffective.” The Panel was undoubtedly aware of this when they included the statement that within the ecumenical community there were:

Calls for 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 (RGA 2003, 1.1.2, 13/1).

Without pointing the finger of accusation at the Church the Panel nonetheless draws attention to the uncomfortable fact that in many churches scant attention is paid to baptismal preparation and few if any opportunities are available for “spiritual growth and development in Christian discipleship.” It is undoubtedly this indictment on the nature of our ecclesial communities that prompted the Panel to recommend the development of a “basis of instruction” for those preparing for baptism and the subsequent life of Christian discipleship and faith. As already been stated, no such resource has been developed.

Liturgy

Knowing that any changes to baptismal doctrine would eventually necessitate the writing of new baptismal liturgies the Panel considered this important element of church practice. On 13 March 2000 the Panel invited Professor Iain Torrance to give an introduction a book he’d newly edited entitled *To Glorify God* (Spinks, Torrance, 1999) and drew the attention of the Panel to two essays in particular, his own and one published in another volume by his co-editor Bryan Spinks (Spinks, 1996). The Panel also considered the previously

mentioned “Response of Hospital Chaplains...”¹² The essays of *To Glorify God* consider in reflection *Common Order* (1994, emended 1996) of the Church of Scotland and the *Book of Common Worship* of the PC(USA) (1993) with a view to understanding their respective differences and similarities (Mitchell, 1999). In his essay “Fear of Being Left out and Confidence in being included” Torrance reflects on the developments in baptismal theology in the Church of Scotland with a view to understanding the nature of ecclesial boundaries as expressed in the extant baptismal liturgies of the two churches. On balance is the subject of baptismal grace verses faith and the question of whether the church ought to express in its liturgy the importance of baptismal vows and promises over the unconditional and all-encompassing work of Christ on our behalf. With echoes of the Special Commission Torrance reflects that Christ is the whole content of Christian sacraments, the central *mysterion*. “When we are baptized, we are baptized not primarily in a fellowship of human community, but into him and the totality of his life” (Torrance, 1999, 161). Baptism for Torrance is not simply a matter of our union with Christ in his own water baptism but the baptism of his whole life inclusive of his passion and resurrection, for example in Luke 12:50 where Jesus cries in anticipation of his impending crucifixion “I have a baptism to undergo...” (NIV). Torrance advocates that baptism for Jesus is a metaphor for his “deeper struggle with evil, his dereliction for our sake, his death and resurrection” (Torrance, op. cit.). Torrance makes a distinction between the outward act of washing in water baptism (*baptismos*) and the “Christological reality lying behind them” (*baptisma*) arguing that *baptisma* may be more closely associated to New Testament *kerygma* than to the ritual washing of the sacrament (ibid., 162). Citing Christ’s metaphorical reference to his own baptism, Torrance urges that the church must:

Beware of becoming locked inflexibly into the rhetoric of a single dominant metaphor (membership with its connotations of club-membership; citizenship, with its connotations of passport-possession) which may carry us into places we do not want to go (ibid., 162).

In Torrance’s estimation each one of these potentially “dominant metaphors” has the effect of drawing lines to distinguish who is “in” and “out” of the church, distinctions that Christ himself refused to make.¹³ It is interesting that he should take such a line of thought.

¹² I made the editorial decision to include comment on this paper in the earlier section of this chapter as it seemed pertinent to discuss it alongside a similarly non-traditional ecclesial setting, namely the UPA parish.

¹³ Torrance points to the examples of Zacchaeus, the prodigal son, the parable of the labourers in the vineyard and the Syrophenician woman, as indicative of Jesus’ intentional boundary *breaking* practices, p. 166.

Given that liturgies represent the Church's best attempt to codify its expressed theology in actual practice how could the church then avoid the danger of embracing a singular metaphor? If only one metaphor is provided in our liturgical resources how can there be room for a second? And who is to say which metaphors are consonant and which are dissonant with the Reformed. Torrance concludes his essay by reflecting on the differences in baptismal theology between the Church of Scotland and the PC(USA). There is a balance to be kept in baptismal theology between the work of God in Christ and the work of the baptizand. By a careful comparison of the respective liturgies Torrance suggests that the Church of Scotland leans to the former while the PC(USA) to the latter (Torrance, 1999, 166-171). He argues that the liturgy of the PC(USA) suggests a "contractual" rather than a "covenantal" relationship and that "the unilateral indicatives of God's grace are inverted into a conditional, bi-lateral contract" that places too heavy an emphasis on the importance of baptismal vows (ibid., 171). The Church of Scotland in contrast emphasizes the priority of God's love and the mystery of our incorporation within it in baptism (ibid., 170). This is most visible in the relative placement of the baptismal promises. In the *Book of Common Worship*, they *precede* the sacrament but in *Common Order* they *follow* the sacrament. He argues that the latter more effectively conveys the sense of Christ's completed work on our behalf and that the former reduces baptism to a contractual agreement instead of a covenantal blessing (ibid., 171). Torrance advocates that placing vows after the sacrament removes any sense of boundary or pre-condition to baptismal eligibility or readiness. The irony of this laboured decision to place the vows after the sacrament is that in practice it gives the impression that the water is actually the *penultimate* moment of the sacrament and not its heart. The vows represent the last participatory act both for the baptizand and his/her sponsors as well as for the congregation, leaving the impression that the vows are, in actuality, the most important liturgical feature of the sacrament. It is theologically correct but practically confusing to those baptised and is likely a theological distinction that is lost on the laity.

People understand contracts and the making of mutual promises. The danger of tapping into those cultural assumptions is that they often include the boundaries that Torrance finds so objectionable. Promises and vows create a division between those who *have* taken them and those who *haven't*. As a practicing minister I am dubious about the affective power of liturgy and liturgical vows. Vows create only a slender thread of connection to the promises fulfilled in Christ and are easily broken in the midst of crisis or neglected in the years that follow baptism. But it is not our vows, fore or aft that make baptism what it is.

Liturgy cannot bear the sole responsibility for instructing an individual in the full implications of his/her baptism. No matter how carefully phrased and ordered it is no substitute for meaningful and creative inculturation of an individual into the life of the church (Chupungco, 1999, 54-64). Good liturgy, while indicating that a person is now a member of Christ's body cannot in turn transform an individual or family into a known quantity in a local congregation. If they begin as strangers to the family of God they will remain strangers thereafter making the keeping of their baptismal vows especially difficult and improbable. Iain Torrance calls upon the church to "develop further non-spatial ways of celebrating the seriousness and transforming nature of the gift which has been given us" (Torrance, 1999, 172). He leaves open the definition of those "non-spatial ways" but the implication is for something that goes beyond the immediacy of the liturgical moment. Liturgy alone does not affect human transformation. It can signify its status as an ongoing event or articulate its hoped for beginning but like the baptismal water it has no power in itself. As such the church ought always be wary of the temptation to give it too prominent a place in the sacrament, as if it were somehow necessary to ensure baptismal efficacy. It is not. But it is an effective tool, both didactic and emotive for illuminating, celebrating and giving right priority to the work of Christ accomplished for us in His baptism in the Jordan, at Calvary and in the empty tomb. How that is affected in the wider context of the baptised life is a matter for further discussion.

Act Amending Act V, 2000 (Consolidating Act Anent the Sacraments)

On 15 May 2000 the Panel met to consider its first revision to the baptismal policies of the Church of Scotland. They did so by reviewing Act V Consolidating Act Anent the Sacraments. It was a statement approved at the 2000 Assembly that made effort to consolidate the various statements on baptism that had appeared since the inception of the Special Commission.¹⁴ It was in the Panel's revised Consolidating Act that David Wright's influence was most pronounced. In 2003 Wright was invited to give the Didsbury Lectures at the J.B. Maclagan Chapel of the Nazarene Theological College, Didsbury, Manchester. The lectures proved to be the summation of Wright's many polemical writings on the subject of infant baptism and were subsequently published in a short book entitled *What has Infant Baptism done to Baptism: An Enquiry at the End of*

¹⁴ Incorporating Acts IIX 1956, XVII 1963, IV 1975, III 1985 and XV 1992.

Christendom (Wright, 2005). In those lectures Wright provides an extended, four-part polemic against infant baptism. The title itself is provocative and suggests not what infant baptism has done *for* the church but rather *to* it. His implication is explicated throughout the short book as he recounts the deleterious effect on mission and personal ministry within the church since the advent of infant baptism with Augustine in the fourth century. He argues that infant baptism runs counter to the New Testament and early church practices and is insupportable scripturally and theologically. Like McPake, Wright was sharply critical of the exegesis used to justify the conclusions of the Special Commission. In his 1993 entry in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* Wright wrote:

The Commission's labours, resting largely on T.F. Torrance's work, suffered from a density of expression. Its argument 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"...a doctrine of sophisticated elusiveness [that] proved unequal to the demands of pastoral confusion and disorder (Wright, 1993, 58).

A copy of this dictionary entry is included in the Working Party Notebook notated with Wright's distinctive handwriting. It was clearly a resource and an opinion he wanted the Panel to see and to consider. It was no doubt Wright's desire to develop baptismal guidelines that were equal to "the demands of pastoral confusion and disorder" that formed the background of his critiques of the Act 2000.

The Act began by elucidating two baptismal categories, namely baptism of "an unbaptised person upon personal profession of faith" followed by a four-part section under the rubric of "Baptism may be administered to a child." In handwritten notes to the Panel, Wright argued that:

The draft exposes the problems that emerge from an obsessive concentration on the baptism of infants...

Wright complained that listing baptism upon personal profession of faith as a subheading alongside the baptism of a child was "an awkward half-way house" towards a fully developed presentation of faith baptism. Instead he suggested three separate categories:

- A. Generally about baptism
- B. Baptism upon personal profession of faith
- C. Baptism of infants

Wright clearly viewed the Panel's work as an opportunity to right what he considered deleterious wrongs in the baptismal policies of the Church of Scotland. And his suggestions were largely embraced by the Panel. The new Act Amending Act V, 2000 included a short section on general baptismal principles followed by not two, but three separate sections including: "baptism upon personal profession of faith" and "baptism of infants" each with sub-points detailing practice for various pastoral circumstances. Additionally, the Panel chose to include a novel third category for "a person with learning difficulties who makes an appropriate profession of faith." The final wording differed from that in consideration in the first draft. Wright wrote:

Someone is bound to make the question of the disabled (e.g. Down's Syndrome suffered) under "of sufficient maturity." I wonder where this phrase comes from? ... [The phrase] is of course a subtle kind of conditionality, or rather a twofold conditionality – (1) profession of faith, (2) of sufficient maturity.

His comments suggest that the Panel was well aware of the fine line in baptism between grace and faith. On the one hand baptism is a free gift and a work accomplished on our behalf by God in Christ. But on the other baptism is a decision rooted in an individual or parent's *choice* to follow Christ or rear their child with that aim. It is an intentional act of faith. Ought the church then *require* some expressed form of faith *prior* to the administration of the sacrament? Or using Wright's words, ought there be a "conditionality" associated with baptism? The problem for Wright is largely solved by focusing on baptism upon profession of faith in which the response of faith is clearly associated with baptism. Based on his other works it is safe to say that Wright would have been happy to bring an end to infant baptism in the Church of Scotland or at least place some moratorium (Wright, 2005, 100) on the practice to allow for the promotion of baptism upon profession of faith. In this he was out of step with the Panel who opted to create a more nuanced and generous qualification for infant baptism. No minister or Session can discern the true inner motivations of a baptismal candidate and it may even get them entirely wrong. But the church can help by outlining guidelines to avoid "indiscriminate baptism." The Panel broadened those guidelines by loosening the 1963

requirements of communicant membership and allowing for a sponsor to stand in for parent(s) whose faith commitment was less apparent to the Kirk. Their revised Consolidating Act proved a highlight for the Assembly and a delight to the Scottish Press. Headlines included:

- Church Baptism Restrictions lifted, *The Courier and Advertiser*, 21 May 2003
- Restrictions on Baptism lifted, Louise Hosie, *The Press and Journal*, 21 May 2003
- Kirk Relaxes rules on Baptism, Andrew Denholm, *The Scotsman*, 21 May 2003.
- Kirk Eases Rules on Baptism, *The Herald*, Brian Donnelly, 21 May 2003
- Modernizing the Kirk: Baptism reforms can help attract members, *The Herald*, 21 May 2003.

In copy-cat fashion the news articles focused solely on the broadening of baptismal eligibility requirements wrongly attributing the reason for such broadening as an effort to re-connect with an increasingly disinterested public. In particular, the role of the baptismal sponsor was trumpeted as a liberalizing innovation. With amusement McPake reflected that the idea of a sponsor was not new to the church and for the 250 years prior to the 1963 Act, had actually been the norm in the church since it was first clarified in the 1712 Act:

The role of the sponsor...was a return to an idea that was always prevalent...the idea of the sponsor is found in the 1712 act, so you see, that we're returning, to an historic norm...

With chagrin, McPake concluded:

...but then norms that lasted 250 years are quickly forgotten about.

The 2003 Consolidating Act merely restored what McPake described as a “better balance” between the expectations of the Church and the needs and desires of parents and families. Lost entirely to the press and seemingly to the Assembly as well was the far more radical statement about the New Testament norm of “baptism upon profession of faith” and “household baptism.” One is left to wonder how the Church might be different now if the opposite had been true. The 2003 Consolidating Act remains the standard for assessing baptismal eligibility in the Church of Scotland but like the Report as a whole suffers from a lack of visibility and consequent lack of use. As will be seen in the next chapter, practice

still varies widely and remains largely subject to the baptismal policies and cultures of the local church, incarnations which are hardly uniform.

A Dual Track Approach

At its 18 October 2000 meeting the Panel considered a paper written by Peter McEnhill entitled “The Baptismal Policy of the United Reformed Church.”¹⁵ Of particular interest to the Panel was the URC’s practice of a “dual-track” approach to baptismal policy.

McEnhill related in brief the history of the 1976 union between the United Reformed Church and the Churches of Christ. Relating that baptismal theology and policy with the United Reformed Church were much in keeping with the Church of Scotland, he went on to describe the impasse with the Churches of Christ:

The Churches of Christ practised believer’s baptism to the extent that they denied the propriety of infant baptism and required the re-baptism of adult converts to the Church of Christ in order that they might become full members of that church.

The spectre of re-baptism loomed large for those accustomed to the practice of infant baptism and the threat of heretical compromise seemed in the offing for those convinced that infant baptism contravened the plain teaching of scripture. Both sides had much to lose but as McEnhill related:

Adult baptism is always a relatively easy matter for a church which historically has practiced infant baptism...[But] for a Church historically committed to believer’s baptism it is a somewhat more difficult affair to make the shift towards accepting infant baptism in any form.

McEnhill touches here on an issue that was pertinent not only to their own union discussions of the 1970’s but to a much wider and contemporary problem within the ecumenical community: namely that of the baptismal unity expressed so clearly in

¹⁵ McEnhill, P., 2000. Panel on Doctrine Working Party on Baptism 18/10/2000: “The Baptismal Policy of the United Reformed Church.” Unpublished correspondence, used with permission.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.¹⁶ While infant baptism may be the cultural norm in the Reformed Church there are no theological or scriptural grounds to oppose the baptism of adult believers. However, those communions who argue that infant baptism is scripturally and theologically indefensible find it much harder to embrace fellowship with those who believe the opposite. There is little room to compromise on the subject and much work remains unfinished in ecumenical dialogues. Baptismal theology and practice cannot be easily dismissed as peripheral to the faith, and so it was in the union discussion between the Churches of Christ and the United Reformed Church. Resolution eventually came in the form of the URC's "dual track" approach to baptism in which the united communion allows for both infant and adult believer's baptism. While on the surface that position may sound the same as the Church of Scotland, it is in actuality very different. McEnhill relates that the agreed upon basis of union for the two churches included the phrase:

The URC holds in trust for the coming great Church a dual track practice of baptism, in which as a Church we recognize both infant and believer's baptism...we hold that baptism is the sacrament of entry into the Church and is therefore administered only once.

On paper the URC is bound together by this agreement but McEnhill suggests it is not without its problems. Church law makes provision for both practices but within the URC there are those ministers and members who retain strong objections to the practice of infant baptism. The URC has what McEnhill describes as a "conscience clause" that prevents a minister from being forced to baptise in a manner that is "contrary to his or her beliefs" and those with objections to infant baptism are allowed to make provision for the sacrament through colleagues who are more amenable to the alternative "track." However he writes: "This has not always been the practice on the ground" and intimates that some ministers and congregations not only deny the validity of infant baptism but continue to *re-baptise* those who seek membership in their congregations. Church law notwithstanding, uniformity of practice has remained an elusive goal for the United Reformed Church.

It would be hard to argue that the challenges faced by the Church of Scotland bear the same measure of complexity. While there are undoubtedly some ministers and

¹⁶ While there is much to celebrate in *BEM* regarding the ecumenical consensus around the subject of baptism there remain profound differences between believer's and paedobaptist traditions that cannot be simply glossed over.

congregations who find adult/believer's baptism more agreeable than infant baptism, as a Reformed communion the Church of Scotland affirms that baptism is allowable to both infants *and* adults. While the cultural norm is infant baptism, liturgical provision has long been made for the baptism of professing adults (Sprott, 1905, 320-28; *Book of Common Order* editions of 1928, 1940, 1978, 1994, and 2005) and where that provision has been absent ministers have had the freedom to adapt the infant liturgy accordingly. To use the term "dual track" then is a bit of a misnomer. Curiously though, the Church of Scotland had already embraced the idea of a dual track.

In an unpublished paper McPake (2005) draws attention to the 1985 General Assembly when the Assembly approved a deliverance from the Report of the Board of World Mission which stated:

Affirm that Baptism constitutes a basic unity among Christians This is fundamental; agree with Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry that Infant and Believers' Baptism should be "equivalent alternative" forms of administration in any reunion between paedobaptist churches and churches which practise only Believers' Baptism; and recognise that the historical reason for the division of the Church at this point would thus be removed (RGA 1985, 28 as cited in McPake, 2005, 4).

McPake writes with astonishment that had the Assembly been properly aware of the implications of such a statement:

The effect would have been nothing other than the overthrow of the prevailing 'consensus' paradigm inaugurated by the Special Commission on Baptism and its replacement by the new 'consensus' inaugurated by Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Of course, nothing of the sort happened (*ibid.*).

Perhaps the Assembly was not fully conscious of the implications of the deliverance from the Board of World Mission, or perhaps McPake underestimated just how far the Church of Scotland had *already* moved from the "consensus" of the 1963 Report. In retrospect it appears that the consensus of the *BEM* already seemed normative and that a "dual track" model would soon become a reality for the Church of Scotland. With the 2003 Report it did indeed become the norm, though not in the same way as the United Reformed Church. The McEnill paper gives the impression that in the URC dual track can mean infant

baptism *or* adult baptism. The Church of Scotland in contrast embraced a dual track model that was inclusive of both infant *and* adult baptism. Perhaps the church had simply come to understand that a qualifying adjective was no longer necessary: baptism is baptism.

Thanksgiving for, and Blessing of, a Child

Before affirming baptism by profession of faith as the normative standard for the Church of Scotland the Panel recognized that some form of liturgy was needed as an alternative to infant baptism. Their 2003 Deliverance remitted "...to the Panel on Worship the preparation of orders for Thanksgiving for, and Blessing of, a Child" (RGA 2003, 13/1). McPake recalls that the MERC Report highlighted a variety of practices already being used in the Church of Scotland including infant blessing and thanksgiving services, (RGA 2003, 1.4.2.1, 13/6):

Clearly other practices had been growing up within the church alongside the...formally permitted. You saw the evolution of services of dedication within the URC tradition...you had a two-practice model, services of blessing, services of baptism, offered as alternatives. The available URC liturgies offered that, and so you saw the...different models available and some people were using these...so you had these things evolving outwith the official provision of the church.

Once again practice was leading theology, *lex orandi, lex credenda*.¹⁷ Whether McPake and the Panel felt the circumstance was problematic is a matter for speculation but what cannot be doubted is that they took the matter seriously and took up the question in earnest at their 13 December 2000 meeting. The minutes record lively discussion. Two resources were considered: The Church of England *Common Worship* and the URC *Service Book*, 1989. Galbraith wrote of the Thanksgiving services in these two ecumenical partners:

Such services arose also, however, from a variety of need and contemporary circumstance: emergencies, greater mobility, a rise in believer's baptism. This was a pastoral resource in contexts where infant baptism can not in all conscience be administered...*its purpose was to safeguard the abuse of Baptism* (italics mine).

¹⁷ Meaning, "How the church worships is a prophetic witness to the truth of what she professes." See <http://www.catholic.org/news/hf/faith/story.php?id=39029> [Accessed 25 February 2017].

Galbraith and the Panel were clearly aware that ministers were often faced with an awkward choice between saying “No” to a baptismal request or offering the sacrament without any expectation of a meaningful connection to the church or even to the faith. “No” is not an easy word for a minister to *say*, and it is difficult to *hear* as anything other than a message of divine rejection. To avoid that outcome many ministers simply baptised anyone who asked. It is apparent that the Panel felt that such indiscriminate practice constituted “abuse.” To stave off further abuses the Panel included in its deliverance a call for the development of liturgies of “Thanksgiving for, and Blessing of, a Child.” A series of liturgies were subsequently prepared and published as a separate booklet in 2006, entitled *A Welcome to a Child: Four Orders for Thanksgiving and Blessing* (Church of Scotland, 2006).

In the preface to *Welcome* Douglas Galbraith, who at the time was completing a term of service as Coordinator of the Office for Worship and Doctrine wrote these words:

In the course of the 2003 Report, it was noted that the Church today was in a primary missionary situation and that a flexibility of provision would be an advantage (*ibid.*).

Galbraith clearly lifted the phrase from the 2003 Report which read:

The Panel proposes that the Panel on Worship be instructed to draw up an order of service for Thanksgiving, or Blessing, on the Birth or Adoption of a Child, not as an alternative to the celebration of Baptism, but in recognition of the need to provide a flexible response to the situation of primary mission This is the Scotland of today (RGA 2003, 1.4.2.1, 13/6).

Welcome provides the Church with a useful tool for approaching baptism with “flexibility” and enables a minister to handle a baptismal request with added creativity and pastoral sensitivity. Gone are the days when the options were “baptism or nothing” (*ibid.*). As highlighted in *The Impact of Baptism: A Study Guide*¹⁸, a service of Thanksgiving creates an alternative ritual for those within the Church of Scotland who hold convictions about

¹⁸ Prepared as a supplement to the 1999 MERC Report.

the necessary primacy of baptism upon profession of faith. It also allows for the public recognition and congregational welcome of those infants who were previously baptised in “emergency situations.” In another sense though, *Welcome* subtly fences the sacrament from those for whom it has little meaning or significance beyond what Wright later described as: “a rite of babyhood, the religious icing on the cake of a family get-together” (Wright 2005, 101). Baptism is certainly a rite of the deepest religious significance marking one of life’s great “sacred moments” (Davie, 2007, 224) but it is also easily reduced into something largely emptied of its sacramental character. *Welcome* provides an alternative that meets the need for ritual without obliging the Church to compromise its theological integrity by dispensing baptism “on the cheap.”

The Continental Theologians

In its first meeting the Panel raised the question of why Barth’s writing on baptism seemed to have had so little influence on the theology and practice of baptism in the Church of Scotland. Especially given T. F. Torrance’s personal relationship with Barth it is surprising that his voice was largely ignored by the Special Commission and has subsequently been so ineffectual. Recognizing the absence not only of Barth’s work but that of Moltmann and Schleiermacher as well, McPake agreed to prepare a review of what the Panel described as the “Continental Theologians.”¹⁹ He submitted his review to the Panel after its completion on 12 November 2001.²⁰ McPake did not write with the aim of persuading the Panel to embrace baptism upon profession of faith as the preferred norm for the Church but rather as an effort to introduce the breadth of Reformed theology on the subject of baptism. No doubt many Panel members would have already been familiar with that wider spectrum but his paper provides a useful summary of the essential features of those differing opinions.

In 1831, Schleiermacher wrestled with the problem of infant baptism and wondered how the Church moved away from the practice of baptism upon profession of faith and

¹⁹ The Working Party Notebook contains copies of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV.4, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, pp. 162-195, and *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, 1943, pp. 34-53; Moltmann’s *The Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit*, 1975, pp. 226-243; and Schleiermacher’s, *The Christian Faith*, pp. 618-639.

²⁰ He entitled his paper, “Schleiermacher, Barth and Moltmann on Christian Baptism.” The minutes of the meeting at which his paper was discussed (12 December 2001) are missing from the Working Party Notebook.

embraced the practice of infant baptism. He argues that infant baptism is “complete baptism” only with the later advent of personal confirmation and contends that the legitimacy of infant baptism rests upon the “future faith” of the child:

For us...the personal confession of faith is the goal of infant baptism...where this point is not carefully attended to, the ecclesiastical custom of baptising infants is largely responsible for the fact that some people attribute magical powers to baptism, while others disparage it as a purely external custom (Schleiermacher, 1831, 635-36, as cited in McPake, 2001, 1).

He wrote that infant baptism was inadequate and represented only a partial witness to what is expected in the sacrament, namely the “repentance and faith of the baptised.” Like Wright he argues that the practice itself, divorced from any expectation of personal faith inherently devalues the sacrament and leaves a blank space in the minds of the participants as to its real meaning, a space he suggests is easily filled with ideas that diverge considerably from those of the Church.

Barth too rejects the practice infant baptism but unlike Schleiermacher is unwilling to accept that it is somehow incomplete without personal profession of faith. He writes:

Baptism without the willingness and readiness of the baptised is true, effectual and effective baptism, but it is not correct...it is clouded baptism (Barth, 1948, 40).

This is to say that it misrepresents the meaning of the ritual. For Barth, who ultimately rejected wholesale baptism as a *sacrament*, the practice of baptism was an act of the Church alone and one that necessarily followed the act of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual. Baptism was for Barth merely an obedient and external sign of what had already transpired. He divided the work of the Spirit from the work of the Church, isolating Spirit baptism and water baptism. In his *Church Dogmatics* he expressed his mature view of baptism arguing that baptism with the Holy Spirit represents the “awakening, quickening, illuminating power” with which the Christian life begins. As McPake relates, for Barth baptism with water is to be understood in terms of a “personal decision” to join the “community” of the church and to begin a “life of faithfulness to God” (Barth, CD IV.4, p. 37, as cited in McPake, p. 3). This description resonates with the experience described by McPake in his own journey in which his conversion happened

sometime before his water baptism. However, as he later realized there was more to baptism than his own decision for faith. Barth disparages traditional arguments justifying infant baptism. McPake writes:

The strongest argument in favour of infant baptism is that it is “so remarkably vivid a depiction of the free and omnipotent grace of God This is independent of all human thought and will, faith and belief...” However, this argument turns grace into something “which works automatically” and if the logic of this position is followed it would require “the admission of infants to the Lord’s Supper” (ibid., p. 189, as cited, 5).

McPake writes that: “Barth concludes with a word of despair over this ‘tiresome matter’ and expresses little confidence that the churches will listen to the voice of the theological community” (ibid., 194, as cited, p. 5).

Moving to Moltmann, McPake writes that he too rejected the practice of infant baptism arguing that infant baptism is an “...open theological problem as long as the churches that practice it appeal to its origin in the history of Christ” (Moltmann, 1975, 226, as cited in McPake, 5). In other words, to suggest that infant baptism has origins traceable to the intentions of Christ in the early church is to misrepresent its purpose as a function of the “messianic light of the story of Christ’s history” (ibid.). Baptism is about conversion and initiation into a new community and a new way of life. Rather than coming from within the church as an infant in the arms of believing parents, baptism signifies Christ’s ongoing work in human transformation in the lives of believing adults, responsibly professing newfound faith. Moltmann credits this as a distinguishing feature of the work of the Holy Spirit (ibid.). Moltmann argues that infant baptism is rooted less in theological realities than in sociological practicalities and argues that infant baptism is a foundational part of a Christian society and a Christian nation, a goal he believes is at odds with the witness of the New Testament. He advocates that any change in baptismal practice cannot be effected without a more substantive change in the *social form* of the Church (Moltmann, 1975, 232, as cited in McPake, 5). Moltmann touches on a subject of great significance for the Church of Scotland, long identified as the national church. Until the Church of Scotland is prepared to consider its own social form any discussion of baptismal practice will remain theoretical. It is a subject to which I will return in the last chapter of this thesis.

McPake concludes his summary of the Continental Theologians arguing that the Reformed tradition is hardly uniform and that there are “alternative approaches...to some of the most vexing questions which we face in the Church of Scotland today.” Unlike Schleiermacher, Barth or Moltmann the Panel was unwilling to go so far as to reject the practice of infant baptism. Perhaps they imagined the subject would be taken up by a subsequent Assembly or that the inclusion of such a recommendation would have made their final Report untenable or that the question of infant baptism would soon be mute? Perhaps they were willing to accept the “awkward halfway house” of a dual practice model? Whatever the case their review of the Reformed Tradition was strangely cursory. There is no mention in the final Reports of Calvin, Luther or Zwingli, no discussion of the Westminster standards nor any reference to the unique history of the Reformed tradition in Scotland. In 1959 the Special Commission included these words in its Report to the General Assembly:

During the last 400 years the Church (of Scotland) has again and again turned back to the teaching of the Reformers and to that of the Westminster Standards when seeking to clarify its mind and build itself up in the faith (RGA 1959, 651).

In the 2003 Report this sentiment is wholly absent. Reflecting on their decision to focus their attention on the New Testament witness to baptism upon profession of faith, McPake said:

I think that the New Testament does provide a norm for us...and...obviously, the norm develops historically and...there are just times when we revisit that, and ask if there is anything that our tradition has squeezed out of the picture?

The Church of Scotland has been invited to consider what may have been “squeezed out” of its policy and practice by reflecting on the witness of scripture alone. The 2003 Report is a clarion call for that reflection.

Receiving the Report

A complete summary of the Working Party Notebook is beyond the scope of this chapter and the resources discussed here represent only a small portion of those given consideration by the Panel. However, it is plain to see that the 2003 Report was the

product of long and careful thought. When I spoke to McPake I asked him what he was most proud of. With characteristic lack of pretension, he replied:

Let me start at the other end and say where we may have *failed* to do. The Report is an act of the church of the future...a church shaped by, mission and by encounter with those who are not brought up within the church...[but] I fear it never really fed down into the life of the Church as a whole.

McPake wrestles to this day about whether the Report should have gone down under the Barrier Act. Such a move was discussed but “the Assembly took the view that it was sufficiently well grounded that we should pass it” and so it promptly did. The fact remains however, that the Report is still largely unknown to the Church of Scotland. This is due in large part to the failure of the Assembly to develop the called for “Basis of Instruction.”²¹ Considering that failure, McPake relates that it may have been the result of changing circumstance rather than intentional neglect. He recalled:

I came towards the end of my time as convener, there were structural changes within the life of the church and the Panel on Doctrine came to a sad demise.

A change of leadership, a change of structure and a moment was lost in the life of the Church. However, in McPake’s own words: “The Report is an act of the church of the future...a church shaped by mission and by encounter with those who are not brought up within the church.” It is a sentiment whose time has come.

²¹ McPake related to me that after the 2003 Assembly, while still serving as Convener of Panel and Doctrine, he did begin work on the Basis of Instruction, research that he carefully saved on now obsolete 3.5 inch floppy discs!

Chapter Four

The Experience and Practice of Adult Baptism

In the next two chapters of this thesis I will move from a focus on the doctrinal debates and traditions of the church to a focus on practices. This thesis is in the first instance a practical theological research project. John Swinton writes that practical theology is distinguished by:

Its perspective on, and beginning point in, human experience and its desire to reflect theologically on that experience...a key question asked by the practical theologian is: is what *appears* to be going on within this situation what is *actually* going on? (Swinton, Mowatt, 2006, introduction).

It is a look into the experience and practice of adult baptism with the aim of assessing whether what “appears to be going on” is the same as what is “actually going on.” That is, I will listen to the voices of those involved in the experience and practice of adult baptism with a view to assessing how those descriptions reflect the theological statements of the Reformed tradition as outlined in chapters two and three of this thesis. Do people understand and practice baptism in a way that faithfully enacts what the Church says it believes about baptism? Or, is there a discrepancy and if so, what is it? It is a qualitative research project, a study of the phenomena (Smith, 2013) of baptism in which I will consider how the social meaning of baptism is co-constructed by practitioners and recipients (Denzin, Lincoln, 1994, 4). It is a qualitative approach to understanding what baptism means to those who practice it and experience it. I wanted to hear from both sides in an effort to discern whether the same message and meaning were shared in the event and what that meaning was. I wondered if the traditional theological constructs of the church had practical utility or meaning to the average church member. Did they create a framework for understanding or a place of shared meaning between minister and baptizand? If not, then what took their place? What language was used by each party to make sense of the event of baptism? Was there agreement between teacher and learner and a corresponding movement from one to the other? I was particularly interested to know about baptismal catechesis and how the minister went about preparing an individual to receive the sacrament. How did the minister and individual discern readiness? Were there particular curricula used? Were there requirements that had to be met by the individual

prior to the sacrament? Were the ministers prepared to say “no” or “not yet” when those requirements weren’t met? Secondly, I was interested to hear about the experience of baptism itself, about how the sacrament was administered and received. Specifically, I was curious to hear from those baptised and to learn how they interpreted the event and to consider their own sense of encounter with God in baptism. I was interviewing people who were still involved in the church, so it is difficult to say what percentage of baptised individuals stray from the church afterwards. Several ministers commented that in spite of their efforts to encourage active church involvement, some baptised individuals do fall away from fellowship.

Rather than going broad with a nationwide sample, I have chosen to go deep with a very localized one. I was more interested in complex answers (Swinton, Mowatt, 2006) than in simple ones as it was my desire to hear how individuals made sense of their own personal experience and their own personal practice. I used a variety of qualitative research methods, a bricolage (Denzin, Lincoln, 1994, 2) to consider the relative perspective of adults recently baptised and the minister/priest/elder who baptised them. My method was straight forward: a series of semi-structured interviews recorded digitally and transcribed by myself. Given that research processes often require flexibility as research results become apparent I adapted my approach and my questions on a case by case basis. Some of the interviews were one-to-one, while others involved joint correspondents including one small group. I was interested to find participants for whom baptism was a recent and vital memory. Initially I sought out only those person’s whose baptisms had occurred within the last two years. My aim was to speak to person’s whose memories of their baptism would be quite fresh. However, on more than one occasion I spoke to persons whose baptisms were significantly older than two years but whose memories of the event were no less vivid than those who had been baptised within the two-year limit. The bulk of my interviewees came from within the Church of Scotland but also included one person from an independent evangelical church and one from the Roman Catholic Church. Interviews were obtained through a variety of means that included general invitation to Presbytery, Facebook, word of mouth and personal connections. One particularly fruitful interview was obtained through the auspices of *Prison Fellowship*.¹ Baptised research participants were recommended to me by the ministers who baptised them. I was on

¹ *Prison Fellowship International* is an organisation that encourages Christian organisations to engage in the struggle for justice with a particular aim of assisting in the rehabilitation of offenders. I met Alan through *Prison Fellowship Scotland*. See <http://pfscotland.org/about/>

friendly, professional terms with most of the ministers I interviewed but was meeting the laity for the first time on the day of the interview. Because the interviews were semi-structured, their content varied widely but without exception my participants were open and candid not only about baptism and their life in the church but also about the wider context of their faith journey. The ministers were also eager to talk about their faith journey, their call to ministry and their life story generally. Without exception, the interview was the first time the individual had been invited to reflect at length on their experience and their decision for baptism. The ministers embraced the interviews in a similar fashion and I discovered that few had had the opportunity to reflect in any great measure on their practice of baptism or the means by which they prepared individuals to receive it. The interview process was for many as illuminating and interesting as it was for me.

The Interviews

In this chapter I will reflect on eleven interviews I conducted between March 2016 and May 2017. Four of the interviews were with ministers in the Church of Scotland and five were conducted with the people they baptised, one minister having baptised two persons. In two cases the baptised person's spouse participated in the interview. The tenth interview was with the individual associated with *Prison Fellowship* whom I interviewed alongside the elder who baptised him. The eleventh interview was with an individual from the Roman Catholic Church experienced with the *Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). Each respondent was given the option of anonymity and all but one was happy for me to use their real identity.

The Rev Donald Lawrie

- Sharon Thomson²
- Jimmy Neilson

The Rev Donald Lawrie (early 50's) is minister of South and Quarter Parish Churches in Hamilton. Mr. Lawrie was ordained in 1989 and was inducted to the South and Quarter Churches in 2012. Mr. Lawrie baptised Sharon (40's, unemployed). He also baptised

² Anonymous

Jimmy (70's, retired). I had the privilege of being present for Jimmy's baptism and Jimmy's wife Jeanette participated in the interview I conducted.

Preparing for baptism

Early in his ministry Mr. Lawrie was more intentional about preparatory classes but has since developed a different approach. In preparing individuals for baptism he places a heavy emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit saying:

A more biblical model is when faith is professed there is no class preparation, it's all dependent on a move of the Spirit, and you get the impression from some biblical narratives it's a question of "Do you believe this? Yeah. Then, let's do it now."

He takes a light touch with his pastoral guidance:

What I do is go into conversation with the people involved to allow them to give expression to why they feel they want baptized...and a checking out that there is a rudimentary, at least, understanding of what Christian baptism means.

He is in no hurry to press the details of Christian discipleship at the early stage of baptism and public profession of faith. He believes that learning to live as a disciple is a process that cannot be compartmentalized in a series of classes and lessons but rather transpires over time in the life of an individual:

When it's taking place, there's been a very strong sense of the Holy Spirit at work...but it's a stage in their walk with Christ, where they've made public profession and, if you like, the discipleship really kicks in after the fact.

Sharon

There was certainly no rushing Sharon who attended Mr. Lawrie's Wednesday morning services for a year before asking about baptism. She relates that it was during that time that she and Donald met for conversation and teaching:

Well, I knew Donald...he does a ministry hour every Wednesday, when I was learning the steps, he was teaching me what I had to learn as well. So, I knew Donald. ...we did praying, you know...no really counselling as such, because Donald is my minister, but helped me so I could go for counselling...and Donald helped me along the way.

Sharon related to me that growing up she suffered a great deal of sexual violence and family dysfunction and for her the simple act of getting out of the house and coming to church was a very difficult task. Her learning and her growth in faith has taken place over a long period and she was in no rush to be baptised. I asked her if it was Mr. Lawrie who first broached the subject, and she said:

No, I asked. It was about a year in the church, I didn't think I knew enough about it...I understood about the, you know, you have to believe in Jesus, believe in Christ, and between the sermons and Brian (former partner) and Donald, I felt that I knew enough. Obviously, I do not know everything...I know every day is a learning curve.

Later I asked about her understanding of baptism and what she meant about "knowing enough:"

That's...accepting, that God is there...and understanding that there is one God and that our God will always look after us and there's a reason for every shitty situation (laughing).

Sharon's candid life-story revealed to me that she knew more about "shitty situations" than most. She is learning to reconcile her personal agonies and the ongoing trials of her broken family life with her experience of God in worship, daily life and in her baptism.

The Baptism

Sharon chose to be baptised at the evening service on Easter Sunday. It was her first Easter service in the church and was deeply moved by the Dawn Watch service earlier in the day. She described the series of Easter services as “harrowing” and very emotional. When I asked about her baptism she related how pleased she was that “I never cried!” Weeping in church is a regular occurrence for her and while personally embarrassing, has endeared her to the members of the Church. The congregation played a key role in supporting her and welcoming her at the baptism. After inviting her to the front of the room, Sharon relates that Mr. Lawrie:

Asked some questions, he made a joke about fully submerging me! He said if he had more time, he'd fully submerge me. Donald is a great minister, he put me at ease. I was up, asked the questions, then once it was done, he invited everyone up to congratulate me.

Reflecting on the baptism, Mr. Lawrie spoke with warmth and enthusiasm and suggested that Sharon was “full of it, joyous, happy,” a sentiment echoed by other members of the congregation and those who saw Sharon in the days after. Many spoke to her telling her they’d heard it was a nice baptism. Sharon was greatly encouraged by their interest and friendship both on the day and afterwards. Especially important to her was the presence of her family, none of whom participate in a church.

Immediately after the baptism, Mr. Lawrie invited the whole congregation to come forward and shake Sharon’s hand offering her a warm welcome. According to tradition at the South Church, a newly baptised person is greeted by the elders but Mr. Lawrie, recalling the day had this to say:

Caution was thrown to the wind...there was an incredible sense of God’s Spirit...the whole church shook her hand and there were hugs as well, so that really made an impression.

Sharon’s baptism made as much an impression on her minister and her congregation as it did on her. She remains an active member of the South Parish congregation.

Jimmy Neilson

Mr. Lawrie's approach to preparing Jimmy for baptism was very different. Like Sharon it transpired in pastoral conversation. Jimmy and his wife Jeanette were grieving the death of their adult son Alan who had suffered for many years with a variety of illness related to muscular dystrophy. Jeanette was active at South Parish and, crediting her faith, was managing her grief. Her husband Jimmy, less so. Like many men Jimmy supported his wife's church involvement from a distance but was not involved himself. In time however and perhaps in recognition of his need for support in his grief he began attending worship services. His pathway to baptism took several turns before coming to Mr. Lawrie's attention. In part due to the realisation that he was the only member of his immediate family who wasn't baptised but also in part due to his growing presence in the life of the church, Jimmy asked his minister about baptism and was assured that it could be done. When I asked about the sort of things Mr. Lawrie spoke with him about prior to his baptism he said:

Well...about work and things like that... he was just wondering...why I wanted to be baptised. And I told him the story about losing my son...the work I done, all the jobs I'd done since I left school.

He expressed that Mr. Lawrie had come to see him in the home and latterly provided him with a copy of the Church of Scotland resource, *Exploring Faith* that contains an essay on baptism. Jimmy assured me had read that part. When I asked about his understanding of baptism and his beliefs he said:

Well, I would say that, my beliefs are in my heart and I could'nae explain why, and I keep things to myself. But, I did believe in these sort of things...It suddenly dawned on me, why did I not go to church?

Just as he had done with Sharon, Mr. Lawrie planned Jimmy's baptism for the evening service. Mr. Lawrie is intentional about his decision to hold adult baptisms at the evening service and suggested to me that there is a cultural shyness amongst adults who eschew attention, even in baptism which was a theme I encountered in other churches. He contrasts this with the biblical model in which profession is more public.

I do try to encourage that public profession because I know in the past that in the Church of Scotland there's a shyness about having reached adulthood before considering baptism, embarrassment factors and therefore a lot of adult baptisms were done secretly or quietly.

The baptism followed the preaching at the worship service and Mr. Lawrie made use of the *Common Order* liturgy. Great ceremony was made of the wetting Jimmy was to receive and as he knelt before the font a large towel placed over his shoulders. Mr. Lawrie baptised him with three handfuls of water, asking the three-fold blessing of God upon him. Immediately following the baptism Mr. Lawrie helped Jimmy to his feet whereupon the congregation sang "The Lord Bless You and Keep You." Jimmy was then warmly welcomed by every member of the congregation gathered for the service, a moment of special significance for him. Jimmy remembered the experience vividly and spoke warmly about his baptism relating that he was moved to tears and much like Sharon, was overwhelmed with the welcome he received from the congregation, all of whom shook his hand after the administration of the sacrament. Jeanette told me she was "gob-smacked" that all the Elders were present and greeted Jimmy afterwards.

Jimmy and Jeanette continue to attend worship and participate in the congregational regularly in the life of the congregation. Recently Jimmy added his name to the scripture reading rota and is proud of his service in that capacity.

The Rev Andy McIntyre

- Les Aitchison

Andy McIntyre (early 50's) is minister at Partick South Parish Church, his first charge since ordination in October 2010. He is a second career minister, having worked in retail before ministry. Mr. McIntyre baptised Les (60's, unemployed) who came to the church through the homeless café run by the Church every Sunday evening. Les had a mixed background with the church and by his own admission is even now surprised to find himself an active member of a congregation.

Preparation

Like Mr. Lawrie, Mr. McIntyre's preparations largely transpire through informal conversations with potential candidates. He runs a very successful Sunday evening outreach café at the church that provides a meal of soup, roll and sausage, tea and coffee. Originally developed for the homeless in the Partick South Parish, it is open to anyone and is well attended each week. It is followed by an informal service of worship led by Mr. McIntyre. It was at the café that he met Les. In recalling Les' baptism, Mr. McIntyre shared his method:

Les came to the café as a customer, he then became a volunteer, then came to church, and then he asked about getting baptized, and that's his journey. We had a chat about baptism and he'd never been baptized as a child, so I said, "Well this is what it involves. It's a profession of faith, you believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit..." I just went through the basics with him. Then there's commitment from you to support the church with your time and talent and wealth, and we expect to see you coming to church and getting involved. And Les, after a bit of thought said he'd like to get baptized, so I took it to the elders and they said, "Yeah, that's fine," and so, we did it one Sunday night.

Les tells a similar version of the story:

I'd been thinking about getting baptized and never really done anything about it. I went to a few churches to speak about it, but never done anything about it, and then it was just one day I was talking to Andy about it and he said, "We'll have to speak to the elders about it," and he came back and said, "Right, you've got to do six weeks before we can do this."

For Les it was a simple matter of attending over a six-week period, a standard by which Mr. McIntyre assesses genuine baptismal commitment. He managed to five weeks, illness keeping him back for one. However, that proved satisfactory and Mr. McIntyre shared the good news that Les would be baptised.

It may seem like a simple procedure but as in the case of Mr. Lawrie there is considerable pastoral investment on Mr. McIntyre's part. Rather than formal catechesis his preparation is more relational. When I asked about discipleship, he said:

What I tend to do is discipleship by walking alongside people, working in the cafe, teaching in the service, working together, I'm more on the ground, walking alongside them. We've tried ALPHA and bible studies, but get no response.

Following what he perceives as Jesus' way, Mr. McIntyre said:

Jesus called people to be baptized, he didn't take them through classes. There was Philip with the eunuch, "I want to get baptized," and he did it there and then and didn't go through liturgical classes and all that. My kind of theology of baptism is that really simple way, some teaching, some commitment, then go for it.

The Baptism

Mr. McIntyre's chosen means of baptism varies with different individuals:

I tend to sprinkle water over them...sometimes I'll pour in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, over an adult. I have a towel handy. Sometimes it's a pitcher, then make the sign of the cross, as a symbol as well, and then we, I think it's more a ritual of the church, we light a candle as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and when we're doing children's baptisms at the font, we'll also light a candle to symbolize the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Les remembers the event vividly and related to me that he had struggled with grief for several years over the death of his mother. His baptism coincided with a deep sense of healing over that loss:

Before the service, it was as if my mum was standing there and I could feel her presence, and I went, and got up there, and I done it, and I felt a lot better after it.

I asked him to describe the experience in more detail. He surprised me by saying it was:

Enlightenment, as if a big weight had been lifted off my shoulder and I actually understood where Andy was coming from, being a minister and all that...

Les relates that he was raised in the Church of Scotland but thought of himself as an atheist. It was Andy who helped him understand it all prior to his baptism:

I said to him (Mr. McIntyre) I was an atheist and didn't believe in God, he was a bit sceptical about that, but then he seen where I was coming from, and he went, "No that's fine," but I said, "Maybe once I get this baptism done I'll maybe see the light, clearly, more clearly," and he said, "Aye, you might."

While his grief had compounded his doubts Les clearly found a way to reconcile his feelings with the desire to be baptised and to make his profession of faith. Like Sharon and Jimmy, he was overwhelmed by the greeting and the welcome he received from the congregation. One year later he joined the church as a member and was similarly welcomed by the congregation, an experience of love and acceptance he was formerly unaccustomed to but which he quickly embraced:

I've been a church member for over a year now, and two years baptized, and I've enjoyed every bit of it, and if I could, I would get baptized again, I would do it all over again.

Les remains an active member of the Partick South congregation and is a regular participant and volunteer at the weekly café and worship service.

The Rev Kay Gilchrist

- Jean O'Hara

Ms. Kay Gilchrist (50's) is minister at Jackson Parish Church, Airdrie where she has served since 2008. She came to parish ministry from prison chaplaincy and serves the church at which she was baptised at the age of 17. Ms. Gilchrist baptised Jean (60's, laboratory technician). Like Dorothy at Blantyre Old, Jean has a history of some church

involvement but became active at Jackson as a result of her marriage to Jerry, who was already an active member.

Preparation

In 2014 Ms. Gilchrist baptised 10 adults at Jackson Parish Church, more than twice as many as any other Church in Hamilton Presbytery, a fact that surprised her as much as anyone. Of the four ministers I interviewed she provides the most extensive confirmation regime and covers a wide range of topics in her communicant's class including: the Trinity, the Bible, the ecumenical church and Christian stewardship. Adult baptism is briefly referenced in a lesson entitled "What is infant baptism?" When I asked about the high number of adult baptisms she explained that most of those individuals came from a communicant's class she conducts bi-annually. When she began at Jackson she intimated to the Church that if anyone was interested in joining the church they should contact her. Twelve did so and it was with this group that she developed her style of membership preparation, a sixteen-week process. Affectionately, she referred to them as her "Twelve Disciples" of whom Jean O'Hara was one. When I spoke to Jean she had this to say about her baptism:

I decided to become a member of the church...and when Kay became minister, she had said that anybody who would like to join the church to give their names...and she would see if there were enough to start a class. Anyway, I put my name down and went through the process of doing the communicant's course. It was a few weeks...before...we joined the church...for some reason somebody said about baptism, and I went, "I'm not baptized!" and Kay went, "Oh, aren't you? Well, we can kill two birds with one stone! And we could do it on the same day."

Baptism was almost incidental to the act of taking membership vows. Having participated in the membership process Jean was assured by Ms. Gilchrist that no additional work was necessary:

I do not think there was anything that I had to do for the baptism. I didn't have to learn anything or, as Kay said "You've already proved your faith and your belief in God and everything that went along with it..."

Ms. Gilchrist shared that not everyone who comes forward for baptism goes through her lengthy communicant's classes. When I asked why her actual baptismal preparation was so brief she said:

It's just because in the new communicant's classes we learn about the Church as a whole, and we've got to be baptized before they can join, so that's the only reason that we do not have classes for baptism. I have a meeting, or a couple of meetings...

Ms. Gilchrist was loath to delay or deny a request for baptism to adults or to the parents of infants. She is generous in her dispensation of the sacrament:

I won't refuse to baptise anyone because they're all a child of God, God loves us all no matter what, and I'm not going to take away something wonderful that could happen just at that time, and so I do not ever refuse to baptise.

For Ms. Gilchrist baptism is a primary witness to the love of God and in her mind withholding the sacrament or setting unreasonable bounds quickly sends the wrong message about God's love and acceptance. Unlike membership which requires extensive preparation, pre-baptismal instruction is generally brief and informal. Jean attended Ms. Gilchrist's new communicant's course and with obvious pride showed me the many documents covering the various subjects. She described the course to me:

It was just things that made you think about things, like trusting in God, being saved by God...we did it over a period of 16 weeks, Sundays after worship, we did it just by talking to one another about our faith and why we wanted to join and just getting to know God, and getting to know God through someone else's eyes too and what God meant to them.

The discussions as much as the content of the lessons inspired a deeper sense of faith in Jean. While each person told their own tale, faith was the binding commonality with the other members of the class:

The one thing that was all the same was, we all had a deep abiding faith...and I think that it was because of our faith that we decided to join...because of my faith, that was why, and obviously, being baptized was all part of that.

The Baptism

When I asked Jean to describe her understanding of baptism, she said:

I would find that quite difficult because I think it means something different for everybody. For me it was becoming one with God...but how it would be for someone else that has been baptized, I can't answer for them, but that's how it felt for me, it was becoming one with God.

It is remarkable that Jean chose to describe her baptism as “becoming one with God.” This was not an expression she picked up from her communicant training materials nor one she learned from other members of the class. As she said, this is simply what it meant to her. That she unwittingly referenced the Eastern doctrine of *theosis*³ is testament to the significance of the baptismal event itself rather than any prior training or preparation. In her baptism Jean experienced a profound sense of union with God.

She went on to describe her baptism as giving her a strange but deep and lasting sense of peace coupled with excitement and even elation. It was an emotionally charged event in which she was baptised alongside another member of the class. After the baptism, she joined the other members of the class and recited her membership vows, an experience she remembers very clearly. Joining and being baptised with the friends she'd made in the communicant's class was deeply meaningful to Jean.

I asked Ms. Gilchrist to describe her method of baptising:

I just put my hand in the water and make the sign of the cross with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

³ Theosis: Growing into God, human participation in the life of God, deification, divinization, godding, deifying, becoming divine...the Christian life is a process of ongoing conforming to Christ through the active work of the Holy Spirit, that Christians become more and more like God through the continual pattern of holy living. (Taylor, 1851, as cited in Smith, 2012, 112).

When I asked if she put water on the heads of those baptised she said:

No, not on their head. I do not know why, no liturgical reason for it. It's just tidier. They're not getting all soaked [laughing].

She recalled her divinity school training during which she was encouraged to use a jug and an abundance of water, just as with Jesus at the Jordan.⁴ However, Ms. Gilchrist's practice is rooted in her own experience of baptism and the practice of other ministers she has seen, in which the baptised receive the sign of the cross on their forehead:

I think it was just learned behaviour, and any other church I've been in, that's what I've seen the minister doing, I've not been in a church where I've seen anyone do anything different.

Jean remains an active member of Jackson Parish Church.

The Rev Sarah Ross

Dorothy Lennon (John)

Mrs. Sarah Ross (late 30's) is minister at Blantyre Old Parish Church where she has served since 2013 after being ordained in 2004. She came to the Church of Scotland during her divinity training and has a childhood background in the Salvation Army. Mrs. Ross baptised Dorothy (70's, retired) who first came to Blantyre Old for the funeral of a friend. Dorothy has some church background but had never actively participated in a congregation. Dorothy's husband John, who joined the church at the same time, participated in my interview.

Mrs. Ross came to the Church of Scotland from a childhood background in the Salvation Army, a non-sacramental communion. She spoke at length about her theology of baptism:

⁴ The lecturer she mentioned was David Hamilton, who has written eloquently on the subject of baptism and its three prevailing New Testament images: "cleansing or washing, deliverance from danger or death, and birth." See Hamilton, D., (1990, p.15).

I do not have a strong theology of baptism, I value it, I think baptism is wonderful, and I know it's sacramental, but I think, I probably do not rate it as highly maybe as some of my colleagues.

Mrs. Ross describes the act of baptism in terms of our humility before God:

Particularly in adults, there's something about humility in baptism, a recognition of our humanity, next to God's divinity...I always think about Jesus being baptized...there's something really humble in that act of baptism...submission is too strong a word, but there's something about humbleness and humility, that recognition of who God is and who we are that comes from us being willing to be baptized.

I asked her to say more about her concept of humility and she described Jesus' own humility in submitting to baptism leading immediately to His temptations in the desert:

I think in order to do what he did, he has to show willingness to trust, it's almost like a private moment between him and God that has a very public outcome, but there's...something very beautiful and private in that moment, as well as a very public thing going on.

She sees the same thing enacted in adult baptism, a humility in bowing before God and acknowledging God's unique identity as One who is greater than us in our humanity. She likened the practice to the British custom of bowing before a monarch. Baptism is bowing in humility which is at once a private and mysterious moment between God and the individual, but transpiring in a very public setting. For her the act is not uni-directional, but signifies a mutuality:

We come to God and God comes to us...On the flip side of that there's God's welcome which again, you see in the baptism of Jesus, God speaks...God's grace, God's forgiveness...and that opportunity to connect...with God and so I think for me that's what baptism is.

In spite her background in the Salvation Army, Mrs. Ross has developed a unique and creative understanding of Reformed baptismal theology. She has a strong conviction that the efficacy in baptism lies solely with God. She says to parents:

A child is baptised in their own right, as an individual, regardless of the promises they (the parents) make or whether they keep them or not.

In consequence and on par with *Common Order*, she asks the baptismal promises only *after* the actual baptism, emphasising that baptism is a free gift and not dependent on our vows or promises.

Preparation

In terms of her preparing for baptism Mrs. Ross is much like her cohorts in this series of interviews. Assessment comes through informal pastoral conversation and some brief comment about the liturgical aspects of the baptismal service:

So, whoever's being baptized, child or adult, there's always that conversation about believing in God and that concept of faith. I always encourage people that they do not have to understand it all or explain it all, but they need to have that basic, 'God is real' scenario.

I asked Mrs. Ross about the materials she uses for membership classes. She takes a varied approach:

I always do some kind of course material, so sometimes, it depends what church season, if ALPHA is on the go, we do that. Or, I have what I call Church of Scotland night and that's where we kind of pull in issues of baptism, communion, vows and such, because there was no material, but now I've started with this group...they're doing the ABC's of Discipleship. It's the Church of Scotland one with Albert Bogle...it's a four-night series and it looks at acceptance, belonging, commitment and discipleship. And baptism is covered in that as well, and usually I take folks through the service as well, going through the liturgy and it helps answer the questions, the Apostle's Creed, the promises of the adult, the church.

For Dorothy, being baptised was a function of joining the Church:

Well, I knew that to join the church you had to be baptized, knowing that I wasn't baptized that was the main reason for my baptism.

Her husband John was already baptised and joined the church on the same day. He added his own thoughts:

It completes the church entry thing, you get baptized in the Christian faith, you can say you're a Christian, now that you're baptized.

John and Dorothy both spoke in vague terms about the necessity of holding ones "beliefs" as a Christian, one's own beliefs. John said:

You have to get hold of an idea and base your life on it, your own idea.

Dorothy added:

Your own beliefs, as long as it's nice beliefs.

Neither one was specific about the content of their belief, so I asked them about their membership vows and the preparations required by their minister. John commented:

That was the five lessons, I can't remember, there were five weeks we went through Q &A, the video things, and she put things down from the bible, and connected different themes. We did five different trials...we have to live by them.

Dorothy: Which we do anyway, we're not bad people very good, too good...

There was clear reminiscence about participating in the classes and going through a short process of learning prior to their church entry but their own ideas about religion remained paramount to them.

The Baptism

Dorothy has fond recollections of her baptism. She related that she'd had concerns about standing in front of the entire congregation but that Mrs. Ross had reassured her by suggesting that her doing so might encourage other adults to seek baptism for themselves. I asked her what she enjoyed about the day:

Everything, the help, the presence, the feeling, the service, everything, better than I'd imagined...you could have heard a pin drop in that church...and the people who came and greeted us, they greeted us both (her and her husband), it was just so lovely, the things that they said, and I felt that was my family.

Mrs. Ross has an unusual baptismal method and like Ms. Jackson, prefers to dip her finger into the font before applying the water to the individual's forehead. However, where Ms. Jackson makes the sign of the cross Mrs. Ross makes a line across the individual's forehead using three fingers and repeating the process three times, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When I asked about her method she indicated that "all too often baptisms are over before you know it and so I like to drag it out a bit." She related to me that "Baptism is just one of those things they do not tell you how to actually do, so you have to just make it up on your own." There is much in these comments that would justify the development of a new liturgy and baptismal practice.

Like the experiences of Sharon, Jimmy and Les, the welcome of the Church played a role of enormous significance and gave to Dorothy a profound sense of blessing and belonging. Mrs. Ross shared with me that she and John have fully embraced the congregational life at Blantyre Old and get "mucked in" wherever there is help needed.

Lindsay Christian Fellowship

- Elder Sandy Hamilton
- Mr. Alan Hughes

In addition to my interviews with ministers and members of the Church of Scotland, I had the privilege of interviewing Alan Hughes, a man I met through *Prison Fellowship*. I came across that organization's newsletter at a Presbytery meeting and was surprised to find a

short article about a former prisoner who'd been baptised. I contacted *Prison Fellowship* who put me in touch with Alan who was pleased to speak with me. While in prison Alan had developed a relationship with the members of Lindsay Christian Fellowship in Glasgow. When released he was baptised by Sandy Hamilton, an elder in the church. Lindsay Christian Fellowship has its roots in the Baptist Church and in consequence, practises adult baptism exclusively. Using a resource entitled *Believe and be Baptised* (Jack, 2013) Sandy tutored Alan with the express intention of preparing him for baptism. Alan was able to clearly articulate his understanding of the theology of baptism, this due in large part to his grasp of the concepts outlined in *Believe and be Baptised* and to the teaching of Mr. Hamilton. He described his baptism in the first instance as an act of obedience:

It's part of the Lord's two ordinances, go out into the world and make disciples, baptising them, and second, do this in remembrance of me. So, it's...something I wanted to do, the Lord did it, so...I wanted to do it, it's obedience, isn't it?

Alan went on to describe his theology of baptism in terms of forgiveness, death and resurrection. Alan's use of theological language was unique amongst my interviewees. It was unusual to hear words like "obedience, cleansed, make disciples, dying and rising" even amongst the clergy:

You want to be cleansed of all your wrongs...you're getting washed of your old self and becoming a new person, you're dying in Christ, and you're risen with Christ.

Alan shared his lengthy testimony, his prior life of crime, his incarceration and his gradual redemption. Belief in God had been a part of his personal sensibility from early in life. Crediting his elder sister with his early introduction to faith he related that as he got older he strayed down "the wrong path" and got involved in a life of crime. He shared that he came to faith prior to his most recent term of imprisonment. His faith was nurtured while in prison where he met Sandy and the volunteers from Lindsay Christian Fellowship. It was during this time that Sandy discussed baptism with Alan and together worked through *Believe and be Baptised*. Alan shared that he was baptised "three and half or four years" after his conversion. When I asked about the length of time between the two he related that he needed the time to "grow spiritually" and "learn the way of Jesus" (Fiddes, 2002, 281).

Sandy described his time with Alan and explained that it was important that an individual has a clear understanding of the meaning of baptism and holds the right motivations for seeking the sacrament. A study of *Believe* is a prerequisite for baptism:

Your understanding is important, to some extent I'm testing their faith... some people think they become Christians when they're baptized...it's important that we do test his faith, that he's not doing it for any misguided reasons, or he's misunderstood what's happening...Alan, through his own study of scripture, learned the truth.

The Baptism

Following custom in the evangelical church, Alan was baptised by immersion. Because Lindsay Christian Fellowship is only eight years old they do not presently have their own church building and meet in a hired Boy Scout hall. I asked how they handled baptism, and Sandy explained:

It's a birth pool, we hired it as a baptismal tank, it also doubles as a birth pool.⁵

The wood floor of the hall is covered with polythene sheets and overnight, prior to the baptism, the pool is slowly filled. Alan explained that he stayed at the hall to monitor the progress. I couldn't help but draw a number of connections to the ancient practice of baptism by immersion and marvelled that Lindsay Fellowship had not realised the theological significance of using a birth pool as a sign of our new birth in Christ (Jensen, 2012, 56-7). I also explained to Alan the ancient practice of the Easter Vigil (Wright, 2005, 74; Kavanagh, 1978, 109) in which baptismal candidates remained in the church on the night prior to their Easter baptism. These allusions were a surprise to both Alan and Sandy.

Alan went on to relate that he and another woman were baptised on the same day. Each was asked to choose their favourite hymn for the service and to prepare a written copy of

⁵ See Appendix One for images of portable and permanent birthing pools compared to ancient. The comparisons are striking.

their faith testimony which Alan proudly shared with me. His written testimony was similar in content to the story he shared with me and copies were placed on every chair prior to the beginning of the service. Much like Sharon's baptism at the South Parish Church, Alan explained that a number of his friends and family were in attendance, many of whom were not Christians and had not seen a baptism before. Baptism as a public witness was very important to Alan as a sign of his conversion in Christ:

Quite a lot of people came, friends and family...and then all the people from the church, a lot of people, that's what I liked...most of them weren't Christians, so it's good to have them there to plant a seed in their head, to see me getting baptized, thinking, what's this, he used to be a rogue, it makes them think, and I daresay that's part of God's plan, to have these people along, and it was a great day, I really enjoyed the service.

Alan has not yet joined the Lindsay fellowship as a member. Sandy explained that that was a different process, distinct from baptism. Again, the theme of individual choice is an overriding concern:

Membership's a different issue, we just interview the folk, two members of the church will go and interview whoever applies for membership, but it's not automatic. In some Baptist churches it is, baptism and membership, but we do not practice that, because it's up to the individuals where they want to be.

Much to their credit the Lindsay Christian Fellowship is aware of the high recidivism rate among former prisoners. Part of the Prison Fellowship ministry is the ongoing work of enabling individuals to find meaningful work after release from prison. At the close of our interview Alan received notification in the mail that he had been approved to seek a license as a taxi driver, a process that Sandy had been instrumental in effecting.⁶ To date Alan has not yet joined the church but continues in regular fellowship with the congregation.

⁶ Another remarkable aspect to my interview with Alan is that he lives in the Glasgow flat directly next to the one in which my father was raised, a fact that amazes me to this day.

St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church

- Mr. Steven Morris

My last interview was conducted with Mr. Steven Morris (50's, property manager), a member of St. Mary's Catholic Church, Hamilton. Steven joined the Catholic Church twelve years ago having participated in the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults, a subject I will address in chapter five of this thesis. Steven was baptised as an infant in the Church of Scotland. Growing up with a "Christian mother and a non-Christian father," his family was not especially active in the Church. He said to me: "I think I'd always had Christian beliefs," but did not elaborate on the nature of those beliefs. He came to the Catholic church through his marriage and began to consider joining some 20 years later:

So, it took me a while, but I came to it myself, I wasn't pushed. But, my wife was very encouraging when I made the decision, but it was my decision, to do it.

Over the course of time between his marriage and his initiation he'd attended the Catholic church many times. His three sons were baptised and confirmed in the church and alongside his family he'd participated in a number of other worship services:

So, I sort of knew how it worked, without knowing exactly...it wasn't strange to me, I picked it up maybe quicker than I would have.

When he did join it was through the process of the RCIA. He described the process. After speaking to the priest he was directed to the RCIA group that was beginning:

We started in the September, I think it was the April when we finished, so about six, seven months of an intensive, every week course.

The materials used in the RCIA vary from church to church but offer a broad introduction to Catholicism including a number of doctrinal statements, sacramental theology and practice, Christian life, the Ten Commandments, prayer and Catholic saints. As a member of the church Steven now participates as a RCIA course leader with two more experienced teachers. I asked if the weekly sessions took the form of a lecture:

No, no it's *em...*we maybe cover the Ten Commandments and between the three of us, we maybe take two or three each, so you need to read up on them, and then you would give people handouts and say, look, you can look at this in more detail at home, but you try and relate it to everyday life...

Discussion and sharing play a big part in the training regime which seems very much focused on developing a practical hermeneutic and nurturing a sense of community amongst the catechumens and teachers. This begins when course members are encouraged "to share their reasons for wanting to adopt the faith." For me this was a curious turn of phrase. Other baptizands I spoke with talked about "joining the church," but to "adopt the faith" seemed peculiar to the Catholic Church and suggested something more comprehensive, as if "the faith" included not only faith in God but faith in the institution of the *Catholic* Church. It was a sentiment that came across more than once in the interview, especially when he described his attendance at the Mass:

I didn't always go to Mass, but I started going occasionally during it [the RCIA], you were encouraged to go, but you didn't have to go. I think it was to get you into the routine and to learn, because you know, that's part of, it's like getting driving lessons, to go and learn the format, it's quite a procedural thing, and *it's the same wherever you go, they make a point of saying that* (italics mine).

When referencing his own confirmation vows Steven said:

You were making a promise to uphold the Catholic faith, and *eh...*most if not all that went with it, so it wasn't something I was entering into lightly, and I felt an obligation to try and follow it through.

Presbyterians join the national church and the worldwide body of Christ as well, but the emphasis is more on the local church. For Steven there was something deeply moving and deeply comforting about becoming part of the Catholic Church, something for which he felt his time as a catechumen prepared him well:

So, I think they try to prepare you. It's not, well, I suppose it *is* a life-changing event, but...you know, it's not something to be entered into lightly, it's like a marriage ceremony, in my opinion. You have to think, well, this is a commitment

I'm making here, you know, are you going to go through with it, are you going to honour your vows?

An important part of that preparation included the ongoing presence and guidance of the parish priest, Fr. Harry O'Brien whose involvement in the catechumenate is both personal and administrative. Steven speaks of Fr. O'Brien with high regard, whom he describes as, "one of the *most devout*" priests he's ever known:

He brings a really special presence to the thing, and I think people that are going through it realise that Harry makes them fully aware of what they're entering into, he says, you know, you're not doing this lightly, he's very honest about it, it's quite refreshing.

The Presbyterians I interviewed held their own ministers in a similarly high regard and emphasized the vital importance of the incarnate ministry of the clergy. A turning point in Steven's preparation came with Steven's first confessional, a practice all catechumens are invited but not required to undertake. I asked him about the experience and he described it as:

A bit daunting, I think everyone in the group felt the same way about it, because you have to have to examine your conscience, it's maybe something you're not used to doing.

Steven related that confessional is now less common in the Catholic Church but that for him it emphasized the seriousness of the commitment he was undertaking. Confession was a deeply personal experience for Steven, a transforming moment. When I asked him if lifestyle evaluation was an integral part of the RCIA generally he responded:

No, no, no not to my knowledge. Maybe there was in the past with the Catholic faith? Certainly not, not to my knowledge. No, there's no judgement being made.

Instead he stated:

The Catholic faith seems to be quite a welcoming...there's a levelling out at Mass which I quite like. It doesn't matter if you're a rich person or not, it doesn't matter

where you sit, everyone *should* be treated the same, and I quite like that. I do not like there to be a hierarchy, I like the universality of Catholicism.

Catechumens complete their initiation at the annual Easter Vigil. Steven described some of the elements of the service to me:

The vigil lasts for about two hours in total, if the RCIA is involved you can add about half an hour to that, because, that takes up a big part of it, but you feel very much, a part of the community when you're confirmed, you get embraced by the priest and everyone claps, they generally have a social gathering after it in the hall, the family is there, and you have a sponsor who's there. My wife's mother was my sponsor.

Baptism is administered by pouring, after which the confirmand is anointed and receives his/her first communion. Individuals are asked to wear a white garment as a symbol of their purity. He explained that the baptismal liturgy used for adults was that same as that used for infant, only in place of the godparents an adult is expected to answer his/her vows in the first person. Because of his prior baptism Steven didn't wear white but was anointed and received the Eucharist. In the months preceding the Vigil the catechumens were not allowed to take communion. But as a sign of their inclusion in the Church community, they were able to go forward for a blessing during the Mass. Community and his sense of place within the community, even as a catechumen was a theme that resonated throughout my interview. It was a primary reason for his "adopting the faith" and remains a key aspect of his ongoing commitment.

Twice in my interview he was careful to mention that he was "not a deeply religious person." I asked him about that later and he found it a question difficult to answer. In reflection he compared his own religious practices with those of his mother-in-law, the woman who served as his sponsor when he went through the RCIA. "She's there at the church *every day*." For Steven it is a matter of community and the inarticulate sense of "getting something" from the experience of attending worship:

It's very much part of my routine...it's a comforting thing, for me, I enjoy going to Mass, I quite enjoy it, I like, eh, the service, I get something from it. I'm not a

deeply religious person, I get something from it, I share it with my son, he gets something from it. He gets really, sometimes quite emotional about it.

Steven was asked to help lead the RCIA twelve years ago, and has since helped with three different groups of catechumens. Additionally, he serves as a Eucharistic minister. He remains an active member of St. Mary's and attends regularly with his family.

Looking forward

In this chapter, I have reviewed eleven qualitative interviews I conducted over a period of one year in preparation for drafting this thesis. My intention was to listen to what is actually happening with adult baptism in the church today. I was particularly curious to find out about the ways in which the baptised were prepared for their baptism and how they experienced their baptism. While there is not scope to include the full breadth of those conversations, the content of this chapter is adequate to relate the salient details of those interviews. In Chapter five I will reflect further on these interviews before concluding my thesis with some recommendations to the Church of Scotland for developing its ministry for the baptism of adults.

Chapter Five

Envisioning the Catechumenate

In this concluding chapter, I will draw together a number of themes from the preceding chapters with a view to justifying the need for a catechumenate for the baptism of adults in the Church of Scotland. I will do so in four parts: first by reflecting upon the interviews of the previous chapter and drawing attention to several themes that became evident as I reconsidered what I had heard from my participants. Secondly, I will consider the role of doctrine and reflect upon its central role in sustaining the church and deepening discipleship. Thirdly, I will introduce the Roman Catholic Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and consider ecumenical work on the catechumenate. Fourthly, I will make recommendations to the Church of Scotland as to ways forward with the development of its own catechumenate.

Part One—Reflections on the Interviews

Diversity of Practice

The underlying motivation for the formation of the Special Commission was the increasing diversity of baptismal practice which implied a “a diversity of belief as to the meaning of baptism” (RGA, 1962, 709, as cited in Nimmo, 2009). As revealed in the 1999 MERC Report, diversity of practice remained a concerning issue to the Church of Scotland. It is clear from this brief survey that diversity of practice is still evident amongst Church of Scotland ministers. While I would expect variation from without, I was disappointed to find such disparities within. Beyond use of the same liturgical texts, there is little to suggest that my Church of Scotland colleagues adhere to the same national church. While the breadth of my survey cannot justify a generalised conclusion about diversity across the church, there is little to suggest I would find a more uniform practice in other parts of the country. There is a decisive absence of practical and theological authority when it comes to the church’s ministry of baptism. Pastoral prerogative in defining his/her ministry is certainly important but what surprised me was the anxiety felt by several ministers at being allowed *too much* freedom in baptismal practice. For example, Mrs. Ross raised a concern

that somehow the wider church would discover errant practice and bring some form of censure.

I'm making it up as I go along, [laughter]. And praying that I'm making it up in the right direction. This is why I get worried when they come to do Local Church Reviews, because then I'll find out if I'm going in the right direction.

Alternately, Mr. McIntyre felt *constrained* in his baptismal practice by church policy. Left to his own prerogative, he would baptise more frequently and with less preparation. But more than once during the interview he expressed himself as a man who is under the authority of the church and largely bound by church policy:

And I've got to do that teaching and commitment to satisfy my Kirk session...I am under the authority of the Church of Scotland and the Session, so I follow that.

There is a delicate balance to be kept in the development of institutional baptismal policy. On the one hand, it comes across as too vague, on the other too confining. What these examples do indicate is that the authority of the church, real or imagined is perceived as being heavy-handed and intrusive rather than supportive and constructive. This is a question that bears more research but it serves to indicate part of the problem in establishing *unity* of practice: it is difficult to find the balance of freedom within bounds.

Diversity of meaning

More concerning than diversity of practice is the underlying concern of a diversity of meaning. One of the defining features of my interviews was the relative absence of theological language in baptismal preparation. Aside from Mr. Hughes in the evangelical church there was no mention made by the baptised and only passing reference among some of the clergy of such concepts as death and resurrection, forgiveness of sins, washing, union or covenant. Amongst the laity there seemed to be little knowledge of those historic definitions of the sacrament or the biblical roots from which they spring. In others, in spite of the conscious efforts of the minister to provide instruction the baptised struggled to recall anything particular from the lessons they received. They remembered participating

in the lessons but not the content. Often the ministers themselves were vague about the content of their instruction emphasizing “conversation” as the primary means of instruction. In the course of my conversations the doctrine of baptism as defined in the Church’s historic Reformed writings, the Westminster Confession, the Special Commission Reports or the 2003 Panel on Doctrine was almost entirely absent.

Baptism is rich metaphor and even in the New Testament baptism is subject to broad interpretation. But that does not imply that baptismal doctrine is open-ended or so diffuse as to have no foundational elements. To take one example, I indicated in Chapter One that Calvin argued baptism signified forgiveness of sins and regeneration. And yet I found little evidence in the Church of Scotland to indicate that either of these two concepts held any sway in the baptismal instruction provided by the ministers with whom I spoke. Neither was there any expression of repentance or personal transformation amongst the baptised. This seems a glaring omission. My interviews revealed that baptism was more closely associated with holding certain beliefs, or served as a requirement for membership rather than as a sign of conversion, repentance or forgiveness. All the ministers I spoke to encouraged a measure of waiting for baptism or asked their candidates to demonstrate some form of “commitment” to the church but reflecting on one’s sin and need for forgiveness was not presented as a fruitful exercise during this period. It was only in the evangelical church and the Roman Catholic church that the need for personal reform was evident. Mr. Hughes presented himself as a sinner in need of forgiveness. His former life of crime made it plain that evidence of genuine repentance was needed prior to his baptism. Additionally Mr. Morris related that attending confessional in the Catholic church was a practice commended to catechumens. His own confession and absolution proved a transforming moment for him. In the Church of Scotland however it was deeply concerning to find this most fundamental definition of baptism almost entirely absent. I will say more about the role of doctrine below.

The absence of baptismal training materials.

If diversity of practice and meaning are genuine concerns to the Church of Scotland, then some measure must be taken to provide guidance to its parish ministers and congregations. As was demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three, a reformulated doctrine of baptism offers very little in the way of constructive, practical assistance. Doctrinal statements are

known less for their actual content than for their statements of baptismal eligibility. For example, the 2003 Panel on Doctrine Report is remembered in practice, if not in name primarily as the instrument that made provision for thanksgiving/blessing services and for its allowance of baptismal sponsors in the Church of Scotland. But none of the ministers I spoke with were aware of its statements about baptism upon profession of faith and household baptism, though several were surprised and pleased to hear about that highly significant doctrinal reform. The disconnect between the work of the General Assembly and the day-to-day life of parish ministry could not be more pronounced. If the 2003 Report had been submitted to the presbyteries through the Barrier Act, as Dr McPake reflected there may have been more uptake, but wider discussion does not necessarily lead to wider application. There are perhaps some ministers in the Church of Scotland who are sufficiently interested in doctrinal developments and sufficiently adept at translating those developments for use in the parish, but I suspect they are few in number. A capable minister might be able to persuade his/her session of the validity of his/her vision for baptism but without the institutional backing of the national church, even those faithful efforts would have little impact beyond the local church and would likely be resisted were they to call into question long existing baptismal traditions in the local church. Mr. Lawrie encountered such resistance early in his ministry. He described his baptismal preparation saying: "Part of me feels very uncomfortable because we're trained to be very systematic and this is very un-systematic." In an earlier draft, I described the Mr. Lawrie's approach as "flexible, almost laissez-faire," a description to which he raised objection. He explained to me that he adopted his current practice after a trauma he suffered in a previous charge. Earlier in his career he was more discriminating about baptism, especially with the infants of parents who had little or no connection to the church. Without divulging details he shared: "I was accused of refusing to baptise children." It was an accusation that led to the end of his ministry in the charge and an experience he remembers with great anguish. Baptism remains a subject fraught with conflicting theological and cultural beliefs and expectations and catechetical training materials would not change that. What would be helpful though is for ministers and churches to have the chance to ground their baptismal ministries on some form of agreed upon standard. If the church has convictions about the *meaning* of baptism or the *manner* in which baptism ought to be conducted, then a range of practical material are needed. Granted there is some movement towards providing teaching materials in the form of the new *Learn* series,¹ but the ministers I spoke to

¹ <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/learn>

develop their own teaching materials and those materials are more for church membership than for baptism. Ms. Gilchrist has the most extensive pre-membership training regime and was quick to share those resources with me. I was pleased to see that the materials she uses are, in the main from the Church of Scotland. Most disappointing though was discovering that they were reprints of material produced in the early 1980's, the same ones used when she was confirmed as a young person. It is remarkable that a minister so dedicated and thoroughgoing in her pastoral teaching is forced to copy and re-copy material now two generations old. Why are there is there such a paucity of resources for use in the Church of Scotland?

The Role of the Community

On a more positive note, the community of the church featured prominently in each of the baptismal stories I listened to. Over and over again the welcome provided by the church at baptism ranked as one of the most important memories for the baptised. Prior to baptism it was the community of the church that gladly opened a space in their hearts and in the pews for those who were latterly baptised. The same was true after baptism when members of the church encouraged the recently baptised to take on good works of leadership and church involvement. It was the support of the church that reached out to the baptised when they were hurting and celebrated their baptismal and membership commitments. Each of the baptised also expressed that their sense of belonging was meaningful to them and enriched their faith journey. Ministers encouraged the baptised to find their place in the life of the church both in new friendships and in responsible works for the sake of the church. I was gratified to find that lay ministry is moving more to the fore in the local church. Mr. Lawrie and his newly baptised member Sharon, both spoke warmly about two programs ongoing in the life of the South Parish Church. *New Connections* is run by Hamilton Presbytery, and *Chance to Thrive*² is a General Assembly program organised and resourced by the Ministries Council. More could be said about these and other important initiatives to encourage the involvement of the laity in the church and in the wider community. I mention them here as but two examples of ways that the church has found to enable a deeper relational connection to the local church and a more committed life of Christian discipleship.

² http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/serve/ministries_council/priority_areas/develop

As was evidenced in Chapter One it is not easy being a Christian in today's secular culture, especially when neighbours and family members have either left the church, are indifferent to its claims or feel no burden of responsibility for ensuring its ongoing presence in the community. A vital and life-giving church community will be essential for maintaining the church's existing membership and for developing a winsome witness to those outside the church. In reflecting on congregational life in his own parish, Tom Allan wondered:

But what, in fact, have we to offer him [the new member], apart from Sunday services? He might sing in the choir, or join the Men's club and learn to play carpet bowls or hear a discussion on politics or "look at a film of someone's holiday to Switzerland...and beyond that?" (Allan, 1954:35-36).

It is an uncomfortable question for the church even today. What *does* the church have to offer the newly baptised member? S/he can still sing in the choir, play carpet bowls and join the tea rota but are those things *life-giving* to those who participate? The church is called to make disciples, baptise, teach what Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19, NIV), heal the sick, cleanse those who have leprosy, cast out demons (Matthew 10:8, NIV), feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the imprisoned, etc. (Matthew 25:35, NIV). The church is faithful in these and countless other ways but it is also a wearying institution that demands so much time and energy just to "keep it going" that growing in faith and discipleship seems like the least of all its priorities. Aisthorpe's research into those who had left the church made this plain.

For most of these interviewees, part of their struggles with life as a member of the congregation was that more and more time seemed to be demanded for internal matters, leaving less time to nurture relationships with friends outside the Christian community. One person explained it this way: "... there was a draw ... there was a request for more and more time to be spent in a variety of meetings ... there was the request for Session meetings and for a management committee. There was a hall to be built, there was a lot of time being consumed by all this ..." (2013, 13).

Ultimately baptism leads to questions of ecclesiology in which the church must ask "Why are we here?" There is no singular answer to that question and it is not my intention to address it in this thesis. However, in the deeply secular, post-Christendom culture that is

modern Scotland it is one that demands the church's foremost attention. It is my conviction that when the church prioritises and develops a comprehensive and substantive ministry of adult baptism that ecclesiological questions will be more capably addressed.

Baptism or membership?

A fascinating divide amongst my research participants was the place of baptism relative to church membership. In three churches baptism (Jackson Parish, Blantyre Old Parish, St. Mary's Catholic Church) was synonymous with becoming a church member, but in the other three (South Parish, Partick South, Lindsey Christian Fellowship), the two acts were separated by a considerable period of time, in some cases by over a year. When church membership was wedded to the sacrament of baptism, the baptism was itself seen as *part* of the membership process and individuals shared that their reason for seeking baptism was that they wanted to join the church and needed to be baptised to do so. For those ministers who separated baptism and membership, there was an emphasis on allowing the individual to make his/her own decision about joining the church and their baptism was taken as a separate earlier event. Interestingly, when baptism and membership were taken together individuals placed a higher premium on their decision to *join the church* and baptism seemed less significant. Those who joined the church at a later time talked more about the baptism itself and church membership seemed an incidental event of far lesser significance raising questions about the meaning of membership, an issue that has been of considerable confusion for many decades. In 2004 the General Assembly presented a Report that addressed the many questions associated with the meaning of church membership, including with the Report the results of recalled similar studies conducted in 1973, 1975, 1976, 1977. The 1973 committee was charged with clarifying the meaning of church membership as regards baptism (RGA 1973, Section IV.8), confirmation and admission to the Lord's Supper (*ibid.*, Section IV.9) and "active" church membership (*ibid.*, Section IV.10):

In what sense is a baptised person a member of the Church? Does this depend on whether he is an infant or an adult? Is it legitimate to say that while Baptism in infancy confers membership of the Universal Church, full membership of the congregation is conferred by Confirmation and Admission? (*ibid.*, p. 616).

The committee expressed that it had more questions than answers at this early stage. Subsequent study commissions addressed the question of adult baptism:

In the case of persons baptised as adults, a question can still be raised as to whether a subsequent ceremony of “Confirmation and Admission” is necessary for full membership (RGA 1975, A.4, p. 496).

The Committee was then concerned that:

Whenever a subsequent ceremony is considered to be necessary, there is a clear implication that Baptism, as such, is not in itself the complete rite of initiation into membership of the Church (RGA 1975, A.5, p. 496).

Echoing the work of the Special Commission, the 1977 Report argued:

Whether faith is professed before Baptism, in the case of believers, or after baptism, in the case of those baptised in infancy, the profession of faith is secondary to Baptism itself. Baptism sets forth the finished work of Christ to which faith is a response and proclaims that, before the believers chose God, He had already chosen them. Baptism is never a seal of a man’s decision for Christ but always of Christ’s decision for men (RGA 1977, A.8, p. 461).

The 2004 answer to these issues was quite simply that the definition of membership be broadened considerably and include not only baptism and profession of faith, but “a wide range of divergent practices within the culture that extend far beyond the bounds of the church (RGA 2004, 12/1). Thirteen years later, the issue is no closer to resolution. In his book, Gay (2017) takes up the question, calling membership a “theologically incoherent category.” As a practical theologian Gay pays attention to what the church *does* as much as what it *says* and notes the disappearance of the old pattern of “infant baptism, nurture, instruction in the faith, public profession of faith, admission to the Lord’s Table and enrolment as a voting member of the congregation.” He credits the dissolution of this pattern to “a reduced appetite and enthusiasm for infant baptism, coinciding with a more open and ‘hospitable’ practice of communion” (ibid.). He argues that in some respects, the loss of this pattern is self-perpetuating. “There are fewer occasions for the key moments in that sequence to be witnessed by other children and young people” so that “joining the

church” is “thinning to a vanishing point within the Presbyterian imagination in Scotland” (ibid.).

His comments are worthy of serious reflection especially in light of my interest in baptismal *ordo* as expressed in Chapter Three. The “old pattern” was a *de facto* baptismal *ordo* beginning with infant baptism and nurture, followed by profession of faith, communion and finally “enrolment as a voting member of the congregation.” Whether Gay intends it or not the order as listed and formerly practiced in the Church lends the impression that this particular *ordo* culminates in one’s enrolment as a voting member of the congregation. Perhaps there was a time when, socially and culturally, this made sense. If the Church of Scotland was the “national church” and Christianity held sway over a substantial portion of the population and had significant discursive authority, then “enrolment as a voting member” might hold a strong appeal and represent a significant personal achievement. But when the church is a marginal and minority community whose doctrines, in many ways, run counter to those esteemed in the culture, when the church emphasizes community over individuality and places a heavy emphasis on the transcendent over the immanent, then membership is going to mean something very different and will likely hold far less appeal. It will mean stepping *out* of the cultural mainstream and not *into* it. If membership is to hold any constructive use, the church must decide if it is an ontological category that follows directly from the act of baptism or one that is merely an act of ecclesiastical record keeping. As noted above, in those churches that separated baptism from membership it was *baptism* that had the highest significance. Conversely, in those churches that conjoined baptism and membership, the sacrament played a subsidiary role to the act of joining the church thus giving membership an apparent priority over baptism. My suspicion is that a more thoroughgoing emphasis on baptismal preparation and a greater effort devoted to enabling the baptised life will make church membership a redundant category. Sustaining those who find the courage to make public profession of faith and “join the church” through baptism will need to be thoroughly informed and thoroughly articulate as to their reasons for doing so. For that the church must recover the role of doctrine in the life of every believer.

Part Two—The Role of Doctrine

Redeveloping the church's baptismal ministry will necessitate a more prominent role for church doctrine. It could hardly be argued that the Church of Scotland has been negligent in the study and development of baptismal doctrine. The Special Commission and the 2003 Panel on Doctrine make it plain that doctrine remains a subject of great importance in the Kirk. But it has been a scholastic project with little practical outworking. Consider Smith:

Theologians have placed the weight of their theological energy on what the (institutional) church understands sacraments to do, or officially intends them to mean—their doctrinal efficacy—rather than on what may be of personal significance for the worshipper (how it works, operates, effectually in their lives), (2012, 107).

I found this reality played out time and again in my interviews. As I said above, none of the ministers I interviewed had any knowledge of the 2003 decisions. When I introduced the subject, some told me that 2003 was “before their time” in ministry while others were simply unaware of the Kirk's decision to highlight the New Testament witness of “baptism upon profession of faith.” It is disappointing to note this strange disconnect between the express teachings of the church and the practical work of parish ministers. One might argue that the proceedings of the Assembly seem distant or remote from parish life or that the parish minister is too busy to reflect upon the theological underpinnings of their work. Similarly, as regards the laity one could suggest that theological language is difficult to understand or not particularly useful for everyday life. Hamilton (1990) for example argues that “The gap between what theology is saying and what the laity are seeing and hearing is alarmingly wide. Theology to many seems elitist and remote” (1990, 8). While there are undoubtedly many causative factors behind this discrepancy, in this section I will draw attention to one that is problematic: Christianity remains the assumed doctrinal norm of Scottish culture and in consequence receives little attention in the baptismal process.

Doctrine as Social Distinctive

Alister McGrath, (1990), in replying to Lindbeck (1984) argues that in order to be properly understood doctrine must be viewed within its wider historical context and that its function is derived as much for social reasons as for theological ones. Historically the development of doctrine is “particularly evident in cases in which a religious group originates through rupture with an older grouping” (McGrath, 1990, 38). Doctrine then becomes a tool for establishing a *social* demarcation between rival groups who might otherwise fall under the same ecclesiastical rubric. When social differentiation is of paramount importance doctrinal disputes come to the fore. However, McGrath continues that in the absence of potentially viable rivalries to the established church the move towards doctrinal standards is less compelling and that when the social distinction is no longer needed doctrine fades in importance (ibid., 44). The danger in assuming doctrinal hegemony across the culture is that doctrine fades to the point of *irrelevancy* and the witness of the church becomes little more than an endorsement of cultural values. Raising concerns about the Church of Scotland as the “national church,” David Wright asked:

What if the kind of Christian faith credibly attributable to any majority of the population is credally vacuous, driven by sentiment more than conviction, humanitarian under at best a religious veneer—does the Church of Scotland have a duty to be representative of that religion of universal niceness, barely recognizable as Christian faith? (Wright, 1990, 33).

In other words, when there are no “viable rivalries to the established church” the temptation is to act “as though the Church still enjoyed general acceptance” (ibid., 34). But Wright argues, alongside Murray (2015, 25) that the church in Britain and Scotland is now a minority culture and will likely remain a minority for many decades so that it can no longer assume its creedal convictions are synonymous with those of the culture. Its minority status has in effect made it *socially distinctive* and doctrine must of needs be highlighted in the Church as a means of articulating that social distinction. But doctrine for the sake of doctrine is not a satisfactory answer and as has been evidenced in the last sixty years doctrine is easily ignored.

Doctrine as Sapience

Christian behaviour, or uniquely Christian *being* is a function of both knowledge and practice. Browning (1991) refers to this combination of lessons and practice as practical reason or *phronesis*, the ability to combine theory with practice:

The tradition of practical reason or practical wisdom has its origins in Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*. Jesus used the word *phronesis* in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:24) to refer to the "wise" persons who listen to the message of Jesus and build their lives upon it (1991, 10).

He relates that:

Since the Enlightenment, the modern experiment has been dedicated to the improvement of human life through the increase of objective scientific knowledge (*theoria*) that is then applied to the solution of human problems (*techne*), (ibid., 34).

There is no arguing that this "experiment" has resulted in great "improvement of human life" but his point is that something important has been lost along the way, especially when it comes to the practice of the Christian faith. Charry (1997) argues that the Enlightenment separation of knowledge into two parts raised a false dichotomy between knowledge gained by reason and analysis, and knowledge gained by experience, wisdom or revelation consequently devaluing the second. *Scientia* is "knowledge based on demonstrable and reproducible data"³ but Charry describes the second as *sapience* and writes:

Sapience includes correct information about God but emphasizes attachment to that knowledge. Sapience is *engaged knowledge that emotionally connects the knower to the known...*" (Charry, 1997, 3, italics mine).

In other words, knowledge or technical information *about* a subject serves only one half of its purpose. Charry argues that Christian knowledge was intended to lead to meaningful life in God, but argues:

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/scientia>

Sapiential theology waned with modernity. Theology came to be thought of as the intellectual justification of the faith, *apart from* the practice of the Christian life. The wisdom of God has ceased to function in the church as the foundation of the good life (ibid., 3, italics mine).

By this definition doctrine is purposeful only as it only inasmuch as it creates or expresses a sense of unity between God and the individual enabling him/her to live a more faithful life. Doctrine ought to serve as the “foundation of a good life” in the knowledge of God’s love. Knowledge or doctrine for its own sake, is something less than what it was intended for and without engaging the “knower” more intimately with the “known” it fails in its essential function. Both Charry (1997, 18) and Browning (1991, 38) point to Gadamer (1982, 235, 261) who illustrated the fallacy of the Enlightenment project when he introduced the idea that the supposedly objective observer brings a great deal of what he calls “prejudices and commitments, fore-understandings or fore-concepts,” to an experiment (Gadamer, 1982, 235, 261, as cited in Browning, 1991, 38). In effect, the scientist cannot escape his/her own history, person and prejudices. According to Charry, Gadamer’s thinking created an opening for the recovery of sapiential knowledge:

He recognized the relationship between the knower and the known, and, by implication, the responsibility of the interpreter to assist the reader in participating in that relationship...the Enlightenment's hope of objectivity failed to admit: the modern notion of truth and knowledge, which excludes the knower from the knowledge, is unrealistic and too narrow to be genuinely useful (Charry, 1997, 18).

In other words, the predispositions of the writer negate the possibility of presenting concepts in a purely objective way and the author must recognise a sense of responsibility for presenting his/her ideas in a way that enables the reader to connect the knowledge presented with the source of that knowledge or the subject that is known. This is especially pertinent for the theologian whose work it is to present what Charry calls “the divine pedagogy.”

Christian doctrines function pastorally when a theologian unearths the divine pedagogy in order to engage the reader or listener in considering that life with the triune God facilitates dignity and excellence (1997, 18).

The theologian cannot so distance him/herself from his/her work that s/he is emotionally detached from it. His/her history and personal experience invariably affect not only the content of what is being written but its intended consequence. I am reminded of John Scott's description of Torrance's theology of the *homoousion* as being "doxological" and a concept to be received with "wonder and thankfulness, in adoration and praise" and that Torrance believed such theology should be "lived and prayed and sung" (Scott, 2015, 131). Theology, for Torrance was no academic exercise but clearly an impassioned effort to connect the knower with the known. Similarly, McPake's personal experience of baptism as a "profoundly emotional experience of...sharing in Christ's death and resurrection" undoubtedly influenced the writing and development of the 2003 Report. His passion for his own baptism is subtly expressed in the pages of the Report. The writer can neither escape nor remain uninfluenced by his/her own history and in gifting that to the reader through his/her words s/he invites the reader to travel a similar journey into the heart of God. The writing and the reading of theological texts then become, as Charry argues, "spiritual disciplines undertaken by those open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (1997, 24).

Considering doctrine as sapience casts a different light on the work of catechesis. The danger of catechesis is in divorcing the knowledge from the known or pretending that somehow knowledge of God can be objective or scientific. Catechesis was never intended as a purely pedagogical exercise, like learning sums or memorising rote material. Rather, it is a model of learning in which the catechumen is warmly invited into the source of knowledge, the *agape* love of God. Charry likens growth in faith to the learning of any new skill, advising that:

One needs a guide, preferably a gentle and seasoned guide, as well as other spiritual confidants with whom one can converse as one gains basic competence in Christian understanding (1997, 242).

Those preparing for baptism need to learn doctrine not so much for the sake of learning the "rules" of Christianity but so that they might be enabled to articulate their own inner desire for the things of God, clarify their individual and communal identity and most especially so that they might know for themselves the One who calls them to baptism and into union with Christ. Christian behaviour is grounded in a deep and growing knowledge of the

known, meaning, knowledge of God. Without knowing the script or the *scriptures* and the doctrines subsequently written as interpretive aids the Christian is bereft of one of the most essential elements of becoming Christian. Without knowing God, one cannot grow in love of God and without loving God, one cannot grow in knowledge of God nor can one express his/her experience of God, for doctrine is the unique language of the church.

Doctrine as Language

Again, McGrath:

Underlying the profundity of human experience and encounter lies an unresolved tension—the tension between the wish to express an experience in words, and the inability of words to capture the experience in its fullness...It is threatened with a solipsism, in that unless an experience can be communicated to another, it remains trapped within the private experiential world of an individual (McGrath, 1990, 66-67).

Doctrine provides the language to articulate the experience of the holy. It enables an individual to explain to others what has happened to him/her and provides justification for taking further action in the form of participation in a believing community followed by baptism and profession of faith. Without doctrinal language one would be left with a vague sense of “something out there” or a “higher power” at work in the world. But the church has developed a way of expressing its faith in the form of doctrine and doctrinal language that can be both descriptive of experience and even *constitutive* of experience. That is, words give shape to what transpires in experience. “There are realities that are made manifest to us only in language, and especially poetic language. And it does so because it resonates with us, it strikes a chord in us” (Taylor, 2007, 758, as cited in Smith, 2011, 136). The words may take the form of poetry or song or even be conveyed wordlessly in artwork, but they are words nonetheless that resonate, that make sense of what has been encountered. Words are moving and emotive not just because they accurately describe what has happened but because they create the space within which it happens. The danger though is that words lose their power or become deadened, rote and emptied of their constitutive power (*ibid.*). I fear this is what has happened with the doctrinal statements in the Church of Scotland. Because they are presented as *scientia* they

lose their inherent gift as *sapience*. They do not resonate with the experience of those who use the words, and so become meaningless and are disregarded. Sacred experience remains “trapped within the private experiential world of an individual.”

Doctrine as Renewal

Doctrine also enables the church to recover and renew its sense of identity in the face of cultural changes beyond its control. Browning writes:

When a religious community hits a crisis in its practices, it then begins reflecting (asking questions) about its meaningful or theory-laden practices...if it is serious, the community must re-examine the sacred texts and events that constitute the source of the norms and ideals that guide its practices (Browning, 1991, 6).

As a practical theologian, Browning is ever directing the attention of the church back to its practices as a means to understanding and revising its own theology. As practice begins to founder or fails to resonate with those for whom it is intended the church must then return to its “sacred texts,” i.e., its doctrine and the scriptures and reconsider them in light of the discrepancy between theory and practice. Vanhoozer describes this as the modern “ugly ditch” or theology divorced from meaningful practice (Vanhoozer, 2005, 8). Baptismal doctrine in the Church of Scotland has changed over the last sixty years and in consequence practice has changed with it, to a degree. The best example of practical change followed on from the 2003 Report when ministers and churches were given wider prerogative to baptise the infants of those who were only loosely connected to the church. Provision was made for the baptism of those with learning disabilities and a thanksgiving/blessing service was newly prepared for the Church of Scotland for use with children whose parents were not believers or whom held convictions that baptism upon profession of faith was more suitable. But beyond these additional freedoms I am left to wonder if practice in the church has changed in any substantive way? Renewal would certainly begin in the church with a thoroughgoing look at the 2003 Report itself, but more is needed. As Browning advocates, a return to sacred texts is crucial in the midst of crisis. The Church of Scotland has done the challenging work of reviewing its own sacred texts and the theory is in place, but there remains an ugly ditch separating theory from actual

practice and the question remains as to what might the church *do* differently as a result of its doctrinal developments?

Baptism is central to the life of the worshipping Christian congregation. Without baptism there is no church but without church, there is no baptism. The church baptizes and sustains the baptized in community. Baptism establishes the church and one cannot exist without the other (Kavanagh, 1978, 110). The difficulty is that baptism is increasingly distant from a subsequent life of faith. The 2003 Report of the Panel on Doctrine summed it up well: “We must face the truth that, for large sections of the Scottish population, the celebration of baptism has ceased to have the meaning and significance that it had for previous generations” (RGA 2003, 13/7, section 1.5.2). Baptism doesn’t mean the same thing in practice that it perhaps once did and in consequence practical change is needed if the sacrament is to go on having the desired constitutive effect for the church. It is only in dialogue with its scriptures, traditions and doctrines that the church can reevaluate its practices with the aim of speaking with greater cogency to the world around it. The pathway to renewal often leads back to and through historic roots before finding purchase in the soil of modernity.

Part Three—Ecumenical Developments and the RCIA

In the third section of this chapter I will focus my argument for the development a catechumenate by reflecting on ecumenical developments on that subject, especially as witnessed in the Roman Catholic Rites of Initiation of Adults (RCIA). As stated in chapter three, the 2003 Panel on Doctrine gave considerable attention to the work done amongst ecumenical partners towards the development of a ministry of baptism upon profession of faith. Of particular interest was the work done on the subject under the auspices of the World Council of Churches (WCC). In 1982 the WCC published its now well-known *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* which signalled important steps towards ecumenical agreement on the theology and practice of baptism. Following on from that document was Best and Heller’s (1997) paper entitled *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of our Common Baptism* from which the Panel drew the concept of baptismal *ordo*, also referenced in chapter three. In 2011 the WCC produced another study entitled *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition, A Study Text* making it clear that the subject of baptism remains one of primary interest amongst ecumenical partners. While the

development of this renewed interest in baptism has been influenced by many factors, one could justifiably argue that it finds its origins in the decision of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962-1965) when it called for the restoration of the catechumenate, a decision that resulted in the 1972 publication of the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). In a process known as “ressourcement” the church recovered the ancient model of baptismal preparation and redeveloped it for the modern usage (Yamanne, 2012, 417). The significance of the RCIA for the Catholic Church and indeed, the Christian church generally cannot be overstated. In the US alone, where the English version of the RCIA was first issued in 1987, over one million individuals have been initiated into the Roman Catholic Church (Yamanne, 2012, 401). Riggs (2012) writes that:

With the RCIA came a sweeping reform of baptismal practice, as well as the vision that the ministry of the church lay fundamentally in the ministry of every baptized member of the church” (Riggs, 2012, 3).

The revision of baptismal practice was not just liturgical but additionally carried with it implications for ecclesiology. The RCIA brought with it a “renewed vision of the ministry of the laity” (ibid.) and recognised the unique value of the individual grafted into the body of Christ in baptism, each of whom is encouraged throughout the RCIA process to consider his/her role in the ministry of the church. Riggs continues:

The life of the church and its ministry are conceived not as a flowing downward of the Spirit from the clerics to the laity but rather as a building upward from the Spirit-inspired common ministry (ibid., 8).

It was and remains a recognition that individuals are not only baptised into Christ and his church but into Christian service and into ministry. In other words, the RCIA reminded the church that baptism comes with an ethical imperative and that it is both “gift and call” (Presbyterian Church, 2006, 42). In baptism an individual receives the grace gift of God’s welcome but is also sent into the world as a witness to God’s love. Throughout the process of initiation catechumens are accompanied by sponsors who are mature Christians from the local congregation whose work it is to support the catechumen in prayer and in friendship. In the development of these relationships a catechumen is not only knitted into the body of the local congregation but is exposed to different forms of personal ministry and different incarnate expressions of Christian life. There is a mutuality in the process that is

instrumental in developing and encouraging new found faith and the subjective experience of the individual is respected and nurtured. The process is flexible and varies from church to church⁴ but there is nevertheless, an intentional process through which the catechumens travel. It is divided into four stages, each of which is bounded by a unique liturgical rite performed as a function of worship in the local church. Consider the detail below, extracted from (Pennock, 1985, 151-2):

⁴ During the course of my interviews I spoke to two individuals involved in the RCIA in their local church and I learned that application of the intended rites and stages varies from church to church, some of which follow the pattern more closely than others. Teaching resources vary widely.

Table 5.1

Period	Stage
<p>Precatechumenate: a period of inquiry characterised by the sharing of faith questions and experiences with Catholics and reflect upon scripture and Catholic teachings.</p>	<p>Rite of Welcome: seekers ask for acceptance into the Catholic faith community and are joyfully accepted into the church as catechumens</p>
<p>Catechumenate: catechumens renounce sin, take on a new Christian name and study the faith more deeply, often with the care of a personal sponsor, and learn about the Christian way of life, the scriptures and the Liturgy of the Word for a period of one year or more as necessary or desirable.</p>	<p>Rite of Election: after a period of study and testing of the catechumens' resolve to follow Jesus, the church calls them to a deeper stage of spiritual preparation, typically beginning with the season of Lent. Catechumens are 'elected' by the church and later gather at the cathedral with other catechumens from the diocese and are enrolled for baptism at the coming Easter Vigil.</p>
<p>Enlightenment: the elect are challenged by the bishop to prepare for baptism and full reception into the community, with prayer and fasting during the Lenten season. Special rituals and prayers characterise this final stage of preparation.</p>	<p>Rite of Initiation: transpires during the Easter Vigil when the elect are baptised, confirmed and receive communion for the first time as members of Christ's body. The rite is marked with a litany, blessing of the water, baptism, white garments and the presentation of a candle lit from the Paschal candle.</p>
<p>Mystagogia: During the weeks following Easter, the new Christians meet to reflect on the meaning of recent events in their lives as Christians. Pentecost concludes the catechumenate.</p>	

While the Roman Catholic Church remains a decidedly paedobaptist communion, the process of the RCIA has introduced a new dimension to its baptismal ministry by creating a liturgy and a catechetical process expressly for adults. In doing so it has effectively set the church on the pathway to developing a new ecclesiology, one grounded in the ministry of the laity in the power of the Holy Spirit. Like ripples in a pond, the RCIA has inspired many other churches around the world to reconsider the catechumenate as a means to effective ministry with adults who are new to the Christian faith. Among those developing a renewed interest in the sacraments includes the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Uniting Churches in Australia.

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Though without its own catechumenate, the PC(USA) has made effort to renew its sacramental practice with the 2006 publication of *Invitation to Christ: A Guide to Sacramental Practices*. The study guide begins:

All around us is a changing world where hungry and broken people are looking for a trustworthy word, a place to belong, a chance to start over, a way of life that can satisfy the longing within. The Word of the gospel and the water, bread, and wine of the sacraments are God's gifts to the church for the sake of this very world!
(Presbyterian Church, 2006, 6).

Aware that U.S. culture is in many ways becoming increasingly secular, the PC(USA) has recognised the need to rethink its mission and ministry in which the church finds itself "Surrounded by growing numbers of people who have not been raised in the church and have little understanding of its life" (ibid.). *Invitation* suggests to the church that a renewed sacramental practice has the potential to restore the church's primary focus of "making disciples, strengthening evangelism and hospitality, focusing ministries of compassion and justice and encouraging unity across the church" (ibid., 7). Worthy goals, no doubt. *Invitation* pointedly asks:

What kind of formation prior to baptism will give adult believers the spiritual resources they need to know God more deeply? What ways of receiving new Christians into the church will help them learn *how* to follow Jesus Christ in their

daily lives? What kind of preparation for reaffirmation of faith will help new members reclaim their baptism and discover within it the Spirit's call to grow in faith in community? (ibid., 16).

While there are no explicit answers given to these questions, the church has nonetheless opened dialogue on the subject of baptism as well as the Lord's Supper with a view to the pastoral care of those not only new to the church but new to Christianity altogether. *Invitation* provides a study guide to go along with these practices in an effort to stimulate conversation within the church about the ways in which the sacraments might take a more prominent place in the church alongside the ministry of the Word. Commending the study of the sacraments to the church at large, *Invitation* makes five suggestions to congregations of the PC(USA) encouraging them to take time over the course of a year to:

1. Set the font in full view of the congregation.
2. Open the font and fill it with water on every Lord's Day.
3. Set cup and plate on the Lord's Table on every Lord's Day.
4. Lead appropriate parts of weekly worship from the font and from the table.
5. Increase the number of Sundays on which the Lord's Supper is celebrated, (ibid., 5, 10-12).

In addition to these practical suggestions *Invitation* provides a theologically substantive justification for renewing the sacraments including a discussion of catechetical practices in the ancient, medieval, Reformed and contemporary church (ibid., 29-42). It rounds out the section with a discussion of the RCIA and the World Council of Churches document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982). While *Invitation* is not an express call for the development of a catechumenate for the PC(USA) it does recognize that:

Recently, several Christian traditions have been engaged in conversation and experimentation with the catechumenate. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Reformed Church in America, the Reformed Church of Canada, the Methodist Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), (ibid., 34).

It is not clear following *Invitation to Christ* how many congregations have undertaken such a dialogue nor is it clear as to the direction the PC(USA) has taken on the subject of a catechumenate. Professor Paul Gilbreath of Union Presbyterian Seminary wrote:

There was some momentum a few years back with a limited number of congregations experimenting with variations on the catechumenate. That small experiment never really took hold in a way that broadened the efforts. There may be isolated, individual congregations still trying parts of this out, but I do not know of any broader effort to coordinate these congregations (Professor Paul Gilbreath, email to the author, 22 June 2017).

None of the denominational websites listed included any detail about resources developed for the catechumenate. At the time of this writing I have not been able to speak to someone in the PC(USA) about its work to develop further pre-baptismal resources. Ecumenical efforts do seem to have coalesced in the form of the North American Association for the Catechumenate (NAAC).⁵ The President of that organisation, Pastor Bev Piro, returned my email and indicated:

Most of our contacts are Lutheran (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) or Episcopal Church. We do have small participation from United Methodist and Presbyterian Church (USA). We are always seeking to broaden our reach...at the Annual Gathering that is coming soon, our speakers are from the Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Presbyterian churches, (Pastor Bev Piro, email to the author, 16 June 2017).

Additionally, she mentioned that the NAAC has:

A relationship with catechumenate leaders in the Church of Sweden and there is a "NordiCat" group advancing the catechumenate throughout the Nordic countries (ibid.).

There are a number of resources available on the NAAC website including training on the implementation and use of the catechumenate but no obvious denominational affiliations. The website mentions the recovery of the catechumenate in the RCIA and suggests its growing ecumenical influence. Once again, the theme of ministering to those who have

⁵ <https://journeytobaptism.org/>

“little or no previous connection with Christian faith” (NAAC website), is one of vital importance.

Uniting Church in Australia

During the development of the 2003 Panel on Doctrine Report, member Douglas Galbraith was in conversation with the Uniting Church in Australia who were concurrently studying baptism and baptismal practice. In an unpublished paper entitled “Life by Drowning,” Bos⁶ (2005) writes:

As we emerge from Christendom, the church must find a new identity as God’s peculiar people and again, placing baptism at the heart of church life. This needs to be expressed in clear, energising theology, practised in life-changing rites and accomplished by careful, sensitive catechumenal processes (Bos, 2005, 2-3).

Bos implies that the church is at a pivotal moment in its history and that with the demise of Christendom there is the opportunity for the church to rediscover or create a new identity as “God’s peculiar people.” He writes: “My thesis is that this task of ecclesiastical renewal and theological discovery is best (can only be?) grounded in a renewed theology and practice of baptism” (ibid., 1).

There is nothing on the Uniting Church in Australia website to suggest that baptismal discussions have moved forward to the development of a catechumenate but “Life by Drowning” author Robert Bos has developed a website entitled “Credible Christianity”⁷ where the subject of baptismal debate in the Uniting Church is considered at length. On that site he relates the development of a program much like the catechumenate. In 1994, in response to a 1991 discussion paper entitled “The Water that Unites,” the Task Group on Baptism and Related Matters considered the following statement:

The Assembly must be willing to accept nothing less than a long-term commitment to the renewal of the sacrament of Baptism in the Church. The establishment of a practical catechumenate or time of preparation for Baptism may well be considered

⁶ Used by permission of the writer, Robert Bos. Source: <http://robertbos.net> accessed [16 June 2017].”

⁷ <http://www.robertbos.unitingchurch.org.au/index.htm>

by the Uniting Church at this time when the renewal of the catechumenate is proceeding in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches.⁸

The subsequent reports laid out a justification for the development of a catechumenate similar in format to the RCIA with four stages of development marked with suitable liturgies that led to baptism at Easter. A discussion paper entitled “Becoming Disciples” was circulated, generating over 300 responses, many of which were supportive of the proposal to develop a catechumenate. It came to be known as the “Becoming Disciples” process and was intended “to support congregations in their ministry of evangelism and making disciples so as to culminate in Baptism, confirmation or reaffirmation of faith” (Credible Christianity website). In conversation regarding further developments within the Uniting Church, Bos wrote:

Also, when we re-wrote our worship book - *Uniting in Worship 2*, we made the first section "A. Baptism and related services".

The sections are:

1. Paths to discipleship. The catechumenate (with notes).
 - a. A rite of welcome
 - b. A rite of calling
 - c. Lenten rites

(Rev Dr. Robert Bos, email to author, 23 July 2017).

It is a pattern clearly modelled on the RCIA and adapted for use in a Reformed communion, and well worth further study in the Church of Scotland.

Part IV—Recommendations

Invitation to Christ

The PC(USA) document *Invitation to Christ* has much to commend it. It is a worthy introduction to a revived sacramental ministry in the church and is written from a cultural perspective not unlike the Church of Scotland. The PC(USA) is also enmeshed in a secular

⁸ “The Water that Unites” Task Group Report to the Assembly Standing Committee, September 1993, par. 10.1.iv (Document 3).

culture and the writers of *Invitation* recognized that those coming to the church often know very little about Christianity and nothing about the sacraments. It is well thought out and provides practical questions for discussion amongst Sessions and Presbyteries. It is an irenic document that makes effort to bridge what are often wide gulfs of difference within the church. *Invitation* could be easily revised for use in the Church of Scotland and could serve as preparation for a more extended discussion about the role of the sacraments in the life of the contemporary church.

The 2003 Report of the Panel on Doctrine

This document remains an unfamiliar resource for the Church of Scotland, but it is highly readable and, in a prescient manner, lays out a renewed understanding of the practice of baptism in the Church of Scotland. The New Testament witness of “baptism upon profession of faith” is clear and well justified as is the place of “household baptism.” Like *Invitation*, it is irenic and does not denigrate infant baptism. At the same time though it leads the church to consider a decisive break from the practice not with a ban or a moratorium but rather with a change in focus from the baptism of infants to the baptism of adults. The 2003 Report could easily be adapted for use alongside *Invitation* as a starting point for meaningful conversation about the practice of baptism in the Kirk. Additionally, it could easily be used as the basis for what I believe is the most important and urgent need in the church: a fully developed catechumenate.

Catechumenate

Obviously, the Church of Scotland cannot simply take the RCIA from the Roman Catholic church. There are too many differences in respective theologies and practices to make a direct transfer feasible or wise, but on the other hand the Church of Scotland needn't “reinvent the wheel.” A pattern of catechesis has already been established and resourced from the ancient church. What remains is tailoring it for use in the Reformed church. It is not my intention to do so here, that is for another research project, but I would like to highlight several key features that commend it for use in the Church of Scotland.

Staged Development

The first is that it is a staged development that takes place over a considerable length of time. Understanding the fullness of baptism is not easily understood in one week or two or six. Genuine and meaningful life change is a big task, it is a journey of faithfulness and no one can take a journey in an instant. In a sense the journey *is* the process of formation and just as any journey is punctuated by stops at intermediate destinations, ought not baptism be the same? Baptism is also about growing in love with the One into whose name we are baptised. In our growing knowledge we become emotionally engaged with the known, that is, we grow in love for God. Marking the development of that bond in stages allows the church and the individual to move to life commitment in steps that are more palatable, comprehensible and meaningful.

Involvement of the whole community

Second, the catechumenate involves the whole community of the church. Individuals effectively become members of the church not at baptism but at the initial rite of welcome when they have passed through the first stage of inquiry. This came across clearly in my interview with Mr. Morris for whom the love and the support of the community was felt from the outset of the process. As Kavanagh writes:

Catechumens are viewed not as anonymous attendants at private educational inquiry classes, but as public persons in the local church...The church...has also taken on obligations to such persons as well (1978, 128-129).

Full membership is not completed until the catechumen has been baptised, confirmed and received first communion but s/he is nonetheless included in the life of the church from the early days of the catechumenate. The Roman Catholic Church forbids open communion and in consequence have developed a rite much like that in the ancient church of excusing catechumens from the Mass each week. Mr. Morris related to me that that was not his experience. He said: "You're encouraged to come to church and at the Mass you can go forward for a blessing." There is a lesson here that may be useful for resolving the issue of admission to the Lord's table in the Church of Scotland. Instead of simply allowing *anyone* to partake, catechumens might opt for a period of intentional abstinence from the

sacrament, almost as if they were fasting for the period of their baptismal preparation. A suitable acknowledgement of that unique status would be important to develop.

Focus on ministry

Thirdly, the catechumenate has an intentional focus on ministry; there is an outward focus to catechesis as well as an inward one. Catechumens are encouraged and enabled to take up their own form of involvement in the church and ministry in the world. The point is that Christianity is not merely about belief or even about belonging. It is about learning to act or behave or *be* in a new way, a way that emphasizes concern for neighbour and love for Christ's church. Catechumens are exposed to a variety of forms of church service and are encouraged to reflect on their own gifts and calling to serve, thus highlighting the ethical component of the baptised life.

Broad range of subject matter

Fourthly, the catechumenate has the potential to cover a wide spectrum of scripture and doctrine, limited only by the willingness of the church to creatively offer a variety of teaching and the unique abilities and interests of the catechumens. A key feature of the catechumenate is flexibility. As Hamilton writes, the laity do not just want to be told the answers but "to join in the search for answers too" (Hamilton, 1990, 9). Each group of catechumens will arrive with different experiences and different levels of knowledge and understanding, but there are boundless riches and "a vast reservoir of resources" (Woodhead, 2004, 1) from which the church can draw for meeting those needs and interests. The Doctrine of Baptism produced by the 2003 Panel on Doctrine is merely the beginning of a curriculum that could easily cover the whole outline of scripture, the history and teachings of the Westminster Confession, the movements of worship, the spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture reading, fasting, meditation, journaling, retreat, etc. The catechumenate is not merely an arid intellectual exercise that is "didactic and glum" (Riggs, 2012, 105) but a process intended to introduce catechumens to the panoply of spiritual riches available in the Christian tradition. It is intended to warm hearts as much as to inform minds and Charry (1997) argues there ought to be no separation between the two. One leads sapientially to the other and vice versa.

Meaningful ritual

Fifth, the catechumenate provides for meaningful ritual. In the RCIA each stage of the catechumenate is marked by ritual signifying to the church and to those participating as catechumens that they are progressing towards a greater goal not only of church membership or even to baptism but to the baptised *life*. As I said above, one does not embrace a new life in a moment but rather grows into one over time and by increments of growth. Of course, the baptised life is a lifetime's pursuit, but it is one that ought to be marked clearly in the early stages. Additionally, ritual signifies that an individual is passing through a liminal period in which s/he is moving from one state to another. The rite of welcome for example, states clearly that an individual is no longer a casual observer of Christianity or outsider to the church community. The ritual of welcome moves him/her into a new (privileged?) status as a catechumen making him/her a student and a disciple. The rite of election and finally the rite of initiation indicate that an individual is becoming, or developing in his/her Christian identity through an ordered and intentional process but is also becoming, lovely and desirable to the community and to the Lord. I will say more about these two meanings of becoming in my postscript. The point of ritual is to establish a clear sense that one is moving from one stage to another and that in the midst of the ritual s/he belongs properly to neither to one community nor the other. S/he holds a unique status. Secondly, ritual has the capacity to do what words alone cannot do. Rituals enact what words can only describe. By engaging the senses: eye, ear, nose, touch, as well as hearing, the individual and the church can experience ritual transformation in a way that is far more evocative and memorable than a well-prepared liturgy. As Mrs. Ross said: "A baptism is sometimes over and done with before you know it...I like to drag it out a bit." Much more could be said about the value of ritual, but I will conclude in saying that the Church of Scotland could easily develop its baptismal ritual into something far richer than the mere recitation of carefully constructed words.

Ecumenical bridge

Sixth, the project of developing a full catechumenate could serve as a bridge to building meaningful ecumenical relationships. The 2003 Panel on Doctrine considered the value of

ecumenical cooperation on baptism and reviewed two unpublished papers,⁹ both of which considered the subject of the mutual recognition of baptism, the cooperative development of catechetical materials and even the practice of celebrating joint public baptisms.¹⁰ It is vital that the Church of Scotland recognize both that it is not the only communion struggling to make sense of the Gospel in a secular culture but also that there are resources available for the development of a full catechumenate in other communions. Our ecumenical partners are already at work and the Church of Scotland would benefit immeasurably by contributing to and participating in that work. We have much to offer and much to gain.

Finally, a word about language. Catechesis is a word that has negative connotations in the Church of Scotland. Much like behaviour, catechesis suggests rote memory work and the nag of the caricatured head master rapping the knuckles and stinging the palms of his recalcitrant catechetical charges. It is an image that must be acknowledged and recast. Other monikers are readily available including discipleship, teaching, Christian formation, etc. My own preference is “Becoming Christian,” a phrase I will expand upon in my postscript.

⁹ World Council of Churches, “The Sacramental Dimension of Baptism,” Prague, 29 May-4 June 2000; and Colin Davey, “The Ecclesial Significance of Baptism According to Anglican Ecumenical Documents,” 26 August 1998.

¹⁰ Kerr, Nick, 2004 “Australians Debate: Should churches conduct baptisms together?” Ecumenical News International, Switzerland, 22 July 2004. This article was sent via email to Douglas Galbraith by Ros Milne, on behalf of Sheilagh Kesting on 22 June 2004.

Conclusion

As I said in my introduction, this thesis originated with a pastoral crisis in which I was met with a request for baptism from a woman who had no prior experience of life in the church. Dr McNeil's interest in baptism was not motivated by prevailing cultural assumptions about church membership or family pressures. She simply related that she'd had an experience, an encounter with the Holy Spirit (my words, not hers) in which her conceptions of Christianity were suddenly and profoundly changed. God became "real" to her and baptism was, in her words, the next logical step, but in the months after her baptism she gradually drifted away from life in the church and now no longer attends. When I spoke to her about her absences at worship she related that family commitments made it increasingly difficult to participate on a Sunday morning. Her children had taken an interest in a sporting club that practised on Sunday mornings and in consequence her sons were also missed in the Sunday school. In secular Scotland there is a wide variety of activities available for adults and children alike and worship is easily crossed off the list of options. There is no longer any cultural disapproval for skipping church. In fact, attending church requires more explanation than not attending. Going with the flow of culture means keeping Sundays available for sport or travel or simply having a "lie in" after a week of frenetic activity. I suspect though, that her reasons for abandoning Sunday worship run deeper than the conflict she had with her children's sporting events. I believe that her decision to seek baptism and begin a life in the church left her feeling like a stranger in a strange place and I believe that the church failed to recognise that there is an "ugly ditch" between the church and the surrounding culture. We assumed that she would easily find her way and her place in the new community of the church with little or no intentional effort on our part. Our "catechesis," our training for the Christian life was profoundly inadequate. Charry (1997) writes:

Once one's yearning [for God] is awakened, tracks must be laid down all along the way in order for entering God's presence to be comforting rather than frightening or off-putting...The din of the secular world's ways is so loud that the ancient catechetical norm of a three-year preparation for baptism is not outrageous. For without lengthy socialization into the pacing of the Christian life, *the turn to God will not be experienced as a homecoming but as entrance into someone else's house* (Charry, 1997, 242-3, italics mine).

Were Dr McNeil's experience unique I would be less concerned but she is not the first, nor is she likely to be the last baptizand to fall away from the church after joining. In the wider church, how many have like Dr McNeil drifted away following their baptism? Statistics of this sort are not kept by the church but undoubtedly many ministers will share my sense of chagrin at the loss of the recently baptised. A more pertinent question to ask is, what "tracks" were laid down to enable her transition to life in the church? Was the "din of the secular world" acknowledged and confronted? Was there a "lengthy socialization" process provided? In short, was Dr McNeil's baptism a "homecoming" or an entry into "someone else's house." My own reflections leave no question but that for her it was an entry into a strange house with very unfamiliar ideas and social conventions. I am convinced that a six-week new members' course or some informal "conversation" with those preparing for baptism is an inadequate approach but there is little in the way of alternatives and those that are available are simply too short (too shallow?) and ask very little of those who participate. No one fails a new members' course and rarely is anyone seriously asked to reconsider his/her beliefs or behaviours in light of Gospel imperatives. Belonging is simply presumed from the outset and consequently has little value or meaning.

For the duration of the life of the Reformed church baptism has been a function of Christendom and a right or even a requirement for the parents of newborn children. Baptism has historically been too closely associated with citizenship and birth rite resulting in what Barth calls a "clouded baptism" (Barth, 1948, 41) that lacks the response of faith in the baptised, thus making its theological underpinnings difficult to discern. Baptism ought to be recognized as a turning point in an individual's life, for in baptism we are united to Christ in a death like his, our old self was crucified with him, sin and its power to mortify, estrange and condemn now forever vanquished (Romans 6:5-7; Colossians 2:13-14). It is difficult to imagine words that convey a greater sense of fundamental change. To approach this transformation casually or as a matter of course or as an unremarkable social norm or as a mere rite of birth is to miss its significance altogether. Baptism signifies nothing less than a *rupture in time* in the life of an individual. It is a hinge-moment from which time ought to be split in two: before and after. It is a death and a rebirth, the passing away of the old and the rising of the new, it is transitioning from unfaithfulness to faithfulness and becoming one thing after being another. Of course, baptism is baptism and I do not suggest that the sacrament requires anything more to complete it in any way. It is however my contention that without faith the gifts of baptism remain only

potentialities, like seeds buried in the ground. The individual's faith is important, but the church can and should offer a great deal of its own faith in the form of its welcome, friendship, guidance and support of the recently baptised. It would be difficult for the church to do *too much* in terms of making the way clear for its newly baptised member to become part of the community of faith, but it is very easy for the church to do *too little* or nothing at all, leaving the burden of inculturation to the individual. Crossing the ugly ditch between the secular culture and the church is a journey few can manage alone. But supported by the church before baptism, in baptism and after baptism many will find their way and be welcomed home.

Postscript

A Word About the Title

In the two years leading up to the final writing of this doctoral project I had a working title of “The Experience and Practice of Adult Baptism: Towards a Realised Baptismal Ecclesiology in the Church of Scotland.” It is not without merit and does capture some of what I’d hoped to convey with my research findings but nearing the conclusion of my work I felt as if a change was in order. The writing of the dissertation became something more than a reporting of data and I was surprised to find that the writing process had *itself* proved revelatory. My conclusions seemed to grow beyond the sum of their parts, so I changed the title to: “Becoming Christian: Redeeming the Secular through the *Ordo* of Baptism in the Church of Scotland.” Each of the words in my title add something significant to my conclusions. They are in effect my conclusion in brief.

Becoming Christian

“Becoming” is perhaps the most important word and in choosing it I imagined two meanings.¹ Becoming suggests to me a developing process of formation and something becoming is moving from being one thing to being another. Becoming defines neither beginning nor end, is not quantifiable in any way and cannot be fairly evaluated for “progress” or a lack of it and yet, it is not static. Becoming happens almost as if it were a living thing itself that is growing, moving, changing, affecting and being affected like a river that is never the same thing twice. Becoming is not changed from without by a process or method of development but is a process in its own right. Becoming is about change or perhaps a better word, transformation. Something that is becoming is transforming, a concept I believe is essential to Christianity. Secondly, I think of becoming in its adjectival usage as a descriptor of what is desirable or suitable.² A becoming person is attractive or lovely in appearance or character. S/he is fully as they are intended to be, fully human.

¹ In my discovery of this word I found, much to my surprise and delight, that “becoming” has a lengthy philosophical pedigree, dating back at least to the sixth century B.C., a subject for further research.

² <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/becoming>

The word “Christian” illustrates that becoming is not a random process but is a transforming *into* something and has a goal, an end, a telos. It is a matter of learning to trust and become like the One that Christians call Lord or Saviour or Son of God or Beloved. Becoming Christian is becoming like Jesus but it is also growing in one’s awareness that in Christ one *is* becoming, beautiful, desirable and beloved. Becoming Christian is growing in awareness that one is becoming to God. In baptism we are united to Christ and just as God declared Jesus His Beloved Son, so God declares *all* his children beloved. Baptism signifies that one is both becoming Christian and in God’s eyes already *is* a becoming Christian.

Redeeming the Secular

Redeeming is a word with complex meaning. It can mean “to buy or get or win back” or “to free from distress or harm or captivity by means of payment or ransom.” It can also mean “to change for the better” or “to restore” or “exchange for something of value...to make good, fulfil.” Finally, it can mean “to atone for or expiate,” (Webster, 1995, 979). It’s tempting to limit the meaning of redeem to one or two of these meanings and I believe the church has often been guilty of limiting it to the last definition, presenting an exclusive focus on sin that needs atonement and providing a Redeemer who expiates those sins on our behalf. It would be wrong to dismiss this usage as unimportant to Christianity and that is not my intention, but it would be similarly wrong, and I believe more wrong, to limit the meaning of redeem to atonement. Like baptism itself, redeem ought to be defined with a variety of meanings and metaphors

When I use the term “secular” as I’ve done in my title it too has two meanings. The secular is inclusive of both the *way of thinking* and acting and the *people* who think and act that way. On the surface, secular values may seem to oppose Christian ideals. For example, the secular places a high value on the individual and his/her prerogative to define his/her own way in life, often to the exclusion of any sense of identity or accountability to a wider social group; the culture prizes individualism highly. This of course has a deleterious effect on the community life into which the baptised are called, but perhaps the church has forgotten the inherent value of the individual or with its discursive influence expected undue conformity of its members? Perhaps the church has been too prescriptive in its definition of Christian living or abused its prerogative to “tell people what to do”? Perhaps individualism is a reaction to an authoritarian church? If so, the church does well

to consider the unintended effects of its message and presumptions about those outside the church. No two individuals are alike and even Jesus never approached two people in the same manner. His message varied as per the needs, hurts and hopes of each individual and so must the message of the church. There is no recipe or formula for salvation and each comes to the Lord by his/her own pathway. Without respecting the *individual* who is complacent in his/her *individualism* the church will simply perpetuate the notion that it is an unresponsive and uncaring institution. To redeem the secular is to remember the inherent value of the individual.

Another example is the secular rejection of the transcendent, the sacred Other. This is highly problematic for the church which takes for granted that God exists in living history and is immanently present in our material world. Why has the secular culture turned away from these assumptions? There are many answers to that question but it is not inconceivable that the church has contributed to the problem. Perhaps the church has domesticated the sacred by confining its meaning to creeds and rote routines or suggested that the sacred is only a matter of *right belief*? Or worse, perhaps the church has enclosed the sacred within its own four walls and refused to acknowledge the work of God's Holy Spirit in the world outside the church? If so, it ought not be surprised that individuals turn to other "spiritualities" to make sense of their experiences. Redeeming the secular in this sense begins with listening to those whose life stories have made the sacred seem untenable, unreasonable or impossible. Restoring trust in the sacred is a long-term process that must be approached with patience and understanding. For the church, it means not rushing to judgment or providing facile answers to genuine, searching questions. Before preaching or admonishing the "lost," the church would do well to recognise and repent of its own failure to transmit the faith in a way that is life-giving and welcoming to the stranger. Redeeming the secular is not just about "saving" those individuals enmeshed in secular thinking, it is about learning from one another and finding in the midst of a growing relationship that God is at work in *both* the church and the culture. To redeem the secular is to win back both secular ideas and the individuals that have embraced them.

The *Ordo* of Baptism

Ordo indicates that baptism is part of a wider process of inculturation not only into the church but into the baptised life. The purpose of the catechumenate is not just about

baptism or enabling an individual to “join the church.” Baptism is a sign of personal transition and transformation and it signifies that an individual is dying to an old self and being raised to a new one. In baptism the church celebrates that this has already happened in Christ, but the *ordo* of baptism demonstrates that the baptismal moment is drawn out over a lifetime and that the baptised life is ongoing. Left to themselves the baptised will often fall away from Christian fellowship; a fire kindled by the Spirit will quickly burn out if left untended. The onus then is upon the church to ensure that the baptised have every encouragement to move forward and embrace their baptism in faith. The church cannot expect the baptised to do all the work of integrating into the life of the congregation, in fact quite the opposite. The recently baptised need all the help the church can give to strengthen them with welcome, meaningful relationships and guidance. In the time preceding and following baptism it is the church that must work hard to ensure that baptism has a proper context, a shape and order that involves ongoing life in the community of the faithful. Baptism is certainly the “high water mark” of the *ordo* but it is by no means an isolated event; it is part of a process of making disciples. To redeem the secular through the *ordo* of baptism is to invite those who are outside the church to step into and to participate in a process of transformation to which the church bears witness in the sacrament of baptism. It is the church’s unique gift to the world.

I commend this work to the Church of Scotland and to the communion of saints,

To God be the Glory.

Appendix

Portable birthing pool



NHS permanent birthing pool



Early Christian baptismal pool



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