

II

BAPTISM—THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

WHEN the early Christians baptised their converts they were not introducing an entirely new practice, but were simply transferring a rite which was well known to the ancient world of the first century to a specifically Christian use. The origins of baptism are obscure, and the New Testament gives us little help in this direction. The earliest Gospel record opens with baptism as an already established fact in presenting us with the picture of John baptising in the river Jordan (Mark 1.4). Nor, on the other hand, is there any information in the Old Testament and the apocryphal writings of the inter-testamental period with respect to the origin of the practice. To discover the origins of baptism it would seem that we must turn to the pagan lustrations of Zoroastrianism and the Middle Eastern mystery religions. It certainly seems possible that baptism arose, in part at least, from the rites of the mystery religions, but it must be emphasised that this is but a possibility for which there is no final proof.

These mystery religions were one of the outstanding features of the Hellenistic world, and although originally tribal religions, in their new form they soon began to exert a considerable influence upon the life and thought of the time; an influence far beyond anything they might have possessed in their original form. The aim of these religions was to provide the initiate with salvation (*sôtêria*), not merely a physical salvation from the evil forces which were believed to inhabit the world, but also an eschatological salvation, an immortality of blessedness in the

life beyond. For this reason the various deities, Isis, Serpapis, Mithra and many others, were frequently called 'saviour's' (*sōter*, *sōteira*). 'Admission into the community was by a rite of initiation, taking the form of a solemn consecration. . . . The actual initiation was preceded by various acts of purification. There were fastings, lustrations, and baptisms. After these preliminaries . . . (came) the vision of the deity'.¹ Such baptisms were to be considered as primarily washings, their purpose was to remove the ritual impurities of the material world and the defilement of the old life.² It is of importance to stress this fact that the cleansing of the initiate was ritual rather than moral, and the Jewish philosopher Philo could make the caustic comment, that 'they remove dirt from their bodies by baths and means of purification, but they neither desire nor seek to wash away the passions of their souls by which life is soiled'.³ The function of these washings was thus to prepare the initiate for communion with the god; by them he was made ritually pure in much the same way as the Levitical washings of the Old Testament made the priest ritually pure and able to carry out the service of God. But, as the writer to the Hebrews was never tired of pointing out, they did not effect any inward cleansing, they had no moral value.

Clearly great care must be exercised in any attempt to derive Jewish and Christian baptism from these pagan rites, and in this respect we must emphasise that it is with the rite as a rite that we are concerned at the moment, and not with the underlying concepts and doctrines. This is especially so with regard to the Mithraic *taurobolium*, a sort of baptism of blood which some have sought to link, with little justification let it be added, with Christian baptism. The initiate, in this ceremony, stood in a covered trench and a bull was ritually sacrificed above him so that he was drenched with the blood. As the bull was the symbol of life, this baptism had, it was believed, an unlimited effectiveness, bringing to the recipient both regeneration and purification. Such concepts are far from the ideas which underlie baptism in the New Testament, yet it must be admitted that they became common to many Christians as the years went by. Through the corruptions of a popularised Christianity, Christian

to the practice was the lack of biblical support which could be adduced for it. To overcome this deficiency the rabbis went to great lengths to obtain a scriptural backing for this innovation into Judaism, and their exegetical gymnastics make fascinating reading. The rabbinic arguments were, however, based upon the flimsiest of evidence on the one hand, and a wealth of pre-suppositions on the other. The Hillelite rabbis⁹ consistently related baptismal practice to the experiences of the wilderness generation. The two verses which were vital to their interpretation were Numbers 15.14 and Exodus 24.8. The former reads,

‘If a stranger is staying with you, or anyone is among you in any of your generations, and he wishes to offer an offering by fire, an acceptable odour to the Lord, he shall do as you do’.

The important words for rabbinical exegesis were, ‘he shall do as you do’, and this was taken to mean that the Gentile should be received into the covenant relationship on exactly the same grounds as the one who was an Israelite, born into the covenant. Further, from the fact that the text speaks of ‘any of your generations’ this principle was considered to be applicable equally in any period of Jewish history.

This being established they next appealed to the words in Exodus,

‘Moses took the blood and sprinkled it upon the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words”.’

Here the rabbis made the assumption that Israel had already been baptised before they entered the covenant, a baptism which, they maintained, had taken place at the Red Sea. The operative words in this verse were, ‘Moses took the blood and sprinkled it upon the people’, from which it was argued, by a process of placing the cart before the horse, that ‘it is valid traditional teaching that there is no sprinkling (i.e. sacrifice) without baptism’,¹⁰ a baptism which we have seen was con-

veniently assumed to have taken place at the crossing of the Red Sea. The argument could thus be concluded by saying that 'your fathers were not received into the covenant except through circumcision, the baptismal bath and the sprinkling of blood, so therefore they (i.e. the proselytes) are not to be received except through circumcision, the baptismal bath and the sprinkling of blood'.¹¹ These are, of course, the three essentials of *milah*, *tebilah* and sacrifice. The Hillelite rabbis thus argued that as 'the Jews passed from slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea into Canaan, so the Gentile passed from heathenism through baptism into the "promised land"'.¹² The importance of this argument from our point of view lies in the fact that these concepts were clearly known to Paul, himself educated as a Hillelite rabbi, for the established exegetical tradition of the rabbis by which they derived the baptism of proselytes from the Exodus tradition was applied by Paul to Christian baptism at 1 Corinthians 10.1ff. where he compares the Christian rite with baptism 'into Moses in the sea'.

We must now turn to a consideration of the actual rite of Jewish proselyte baptism and its symbolism. It was a baptism of total immersion,¹³ the candidate was stripped, after having both his hair and nails cut, and before three witnesses, who were designated the 'fathers of the baptism', he made a fresh confession of his sins and his new faith. Thereupon he totally immersed himself in the water¹⁴ while at the same time two 'disciples of the wise' stood by and recited some of the 'light' and 'heavy' precepts of the Law, to the keeping of which the newly baptised proselyte had now committed himself.¹⁵ This act was regarded as effecting a complete reversal of the proselyte's character, he was described as having been 'born anew' through the baptismal rite, becoming thus as a 'child of one day'. Thus the rabbis said, 'the proselyte in his conversion is as a newborn child',¹⁶ living now in a state of 'holiness' (in this sense ritual purity rather than moral integrity). He was no longer an unclean Gentile for he had been 'brought near'¹⁷ and indeed his sins, which had been confessed, were forgiven — 'bathe the whole body in ever flowing streams, reach your hands to heaven praying forgiveness for these things that you have done'.¹⁸

In spite of the use of the type of terminology associated with proselyte baptism it needs to be remembered that the rite was primarily legalistic, it did not really contain any thought of ethical death and resurrection. The aim of these washings was the attainment of ritual purity, the removal of cultic uncleanness, and thus the rabbinical statements are often little more than examples of rhetorical imagery. At the same time, however, it does seem to be the case that from the moment of his baptism the proselyte was to regard himself as a new and changed person in respect of his old environment, his old habits, his old associates and associations. Indeed, so radical was this change envisaged, and so remorseless the applied logic of the rabbis, that it was possible in theory, but only in theory, for a man thus baptised to marry his own mother or sister. The emphasis of proselyte baptism was thus upon the complete reversal of the old order and the renewal of the life of the initiate under the covenant. It was an emphasis upon the fact that the initiate into Judaism stood as though restored to a new life, but, at the same time, in spite of this regenerative aspect, proselyte baptism was, as we have already noted, a purificatory washing in its primary aspect which made no real moral demands. Underlying the rite was also this great tragedy, that baptism admitted the Gentile not into a covenant of freedom, but into the tyranny of the *halachōth*, into submission to the burdensome yoke of rabbinism, a yoke which continually grew more cumbersome with the constant addition of futile regulations and stipulations.¹⁹

Essene Baptism

Within Judaism itself the practice of baptism became extended to include Jews as well as Gentiles. Such was the undoubted practice of the many and varied baptismal sects which arose within Judaism during the second century BC and later, largely as a protest at the increasing worldliness and Hellenisation of Jewish society. These sects have generally been grouped together under the broad title of 'Essenes', although there is, in fact, no evidence that they were an homogeneous group.²⁰ In

their outlook they were essentially monastic, practising a life of rigid discipline and asceticism, and almost certainly considering themselves as the true Israel within Israel, the 'Godly Remnant' of the prophets. Both Josephus and Philo²¹ have given some account of the beliefs and practices of these people, but since 1947 there has come to light the large collection of literature which belonged to the Community of Qumran, known the world over as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Community of Khirbet Qumran appears to have been in the main at least, a priestly group, living in semi-monastic retirement. The suggestion has been made that they were originally the followers of the legitimate Zadokite priesthood who seceded from the Temple at the time of the deposition and subsequent murder of Onias III, the last Zadokite high priest, by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The actual movement to Qumran, however, does not seem to have been earlier than about 110 BC²² in the reign of John Hyrcanus when Hellenising policies were again becoming official. It is clear that they were opposed to the Temple and the sacrificial cultus on both historical grounds and on principle, regarding them as defiled and illegitimate. The primary emphasis of their teaching was eschatological, and they considered themselves as the preparers of the way for the coming Messiah, seeing their mission in terms of Isaiah 40.3,

'Prepare a way for the Lord,
Clear a path for him.'

Their retiring into the desert was, they believed, the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, they were the 'voice crying in the wilderness' and their baptism was thus an act of preparation, an initiation into the faithful remnant, the godly few who were awaiting the promised deliverance of God. As Gloege has put it, 'Qumran considered itself the vanguard of the last things'.²³

It may be noted in passing that it would seem that the 'dawn of the new age would be marked, in Qumran expectation, by the appearance of a worthy prophet, a worthy priest and a worthy king'.²⁴ These personages would be the great prophet to whom reference is made at Deuteronomy 18.15ff., together

with a dual Messiah, the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel. It was possibly the possession of some of these features by John the Baptist, he was both Levite and prophet, which led the Levitical deputation to ask whether he might not be this eschatological figure (John 1.19ff.). There is clearly a superficial resemblance between this view of a double, or even threefold, Messiah, and the views of the early Church, as Bruce has said, 'the Qumran Community and the early Christians shared the view that in the days of fulfilment of all that the Old Testament prophets had said there would arise a great prophet, a great captain and ruler, and a great priest. But these three figures remain distinct in Qumran expectation, whereas the early Church saw them unified in the person of Christ'.²⁵

The great stress which these people laid upon a life of uprightness and moral integrity while awaiting the 'turning again of their captivity', a stress reminiscent in many ways of the prophetic writings, was reflected in their baptismal teaching. They were insistent that the actual baptismal rite did nothing, it was incapable of effecting any change in the person baptised. It was, in fact, to be viewed merely as a sign of an inward change of disposition. This may be illustrated from the writings of the Community; thus with reference to those who would rely on outward forms and ceremonies to cleanse from sin they said,

'he cannot be cleared by mere ceremonies of atonement, nor cleansed by any waters of ablution, nor sanctified by immersion in lakes or rivers, nor purified by any bath. Unclean, unclean he remains so long as he rejects the government of God and refuses the discipline of communion with him. . . . Only by a spirit of uprightness and humility can his sin be atoned. Only by the submission of his soul to all the ordinances of God can his flesh be made clean. Only thus can it really be sprinkled with waters of ablution. Only thus can it be really sanctified by waters of sanctification'.²⁶

Again, speaking of the obligation of holiness on those who had been admitted to the Community they said,

'No one is to go into water in order to attain the purity of holy men. For men cannot be purified except they repent of their evil'.²⁷

The Qumran Covenanters thus recognised, in accordance with prophetic teaching (cf. Isa. 4.2-6; Ezek. 36.25ff.; Jer. 32.8; etc.), that outer cleansing, a ritual purification, was insufficient to meet the demands of God. It was only as one was fit by life to become one of 'God's elect' that baptism took place. Baptism thus had to *follow* a sincere repentance if it was to be in any sense effective. To purify the 'flesh'²⁸ without first repenting was utterly useless for ultimately salvation comes through the spirit and thus requires inner purity. A moral cleanliness was therefore essential if a person was to be in a fit state to welcome the Day of the Messiah, and such cleansing they believed could only be really effected through the working of the Spirit of God active in the Community. Indeed the baptism of water into the fellowship of the Community was to be seen as a preliminary to the Messianic baptism of the Spirit 'in the end of days' when 'like waters of purification God will sprinkle upon him (i.e. mankind) the spirit of truth',²⁹ and here also we see the link with the teaching of John the Baptist (cf. also John 3.4-7). The Qumran Community was thus 'a radical Messianic repentance movement',³⁰ and this moral emphasis which was such an important feature of their teaching, the recognition for a clean life, not merely on the part of the Gentile proselyte, but also for the Jew, goes far beyond the standards set in the regular proselyte baptism, and paves the way for the baptism of John.

The Baptism of John

It may now be seen that when the Herald of the Christ appeared upon the banks of the Jordan, baptising those who came to him, the significance of his actions would be well appreciated by his contemporaries. In common with the standard practice of the regular Jewish baptism and the baptism of the Qumran Community and other 'Essene' groups, the baptism of John was by immersion,³¹ and again, like those of Qumran, he laid great stress upon the ethical requirements of baptism. John was thus not introducing a new rite, bringing into being a special act, rather he brought a new emphasis. His message was clear, 'Repent and be baptised for the kingdom of

God is at hand'. His baptism was 'the first scene in the divine drama of redemption',³² and like the Qumran Community he saw his mission in terms of Isaiah 40.3,

'The voice of him who cries in the desert,
Prepare the way of the Lord,
in the desert clear a path for our God.'

His baptism was an act of prophetic symbolism conveying the urgency of the situation and the need for an immediate preparation on the part of the people, a preparation which demanded a thoroughgoing ethical and moral cleansing. Thus 'without a shadow of euphemism, without an accent of subservience, without a tremor of hesitation, he rebuked the taxgatherers for their extortionateness, the soldiers for their violence, unfairness and discontent; the wealthy Sadducees and stately Pharisees for a formalism and falsity which made them vipers of a viperous brood. The whole people he warned that their cherished privileges were worse than valueless if, without repentance, they regarded them as a protection against the wrath to come'.³³

It is possible that John's ideas of baptism were, at least in part, derived from some such group as the Qumran Community,³⁴ and it may be of significance that, as we have had occasion to note, they also saw themselves as the fulfilment of the voice in the desert, considering that they were the 'preparers of the way' for the coming King by their obedience to the Law. But their preparation was conceived in narrow and legalistic terms, in a rigid and entirely self-centred way. John's preparation was not that of a sect of confirmed bigots, it was a preparation which was for the whole nation, and indeed, for the whole world. The Gentile was not excluded (cf. Luke 3.14), for the baptism of John was a baptism into the new and true people of God who were awaiting the advent of the One who would be endowed with the Messianic Unction and Himself able to baptise, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. The wideness of John's vision was such that the 'previous boundaries of the people of the covenant are absolutely of no consequence'.³⁵ It was a universal baptism by which John sought to gather together

the people of God of the last days before the final judgment which he believed was imminent. The essentially new factor in John's baptism was the extent of the moral and ethical demands it made on its recipients. Proselyte baptism as we have seen, was primarily considered in the light of a ceremonial washing by which the defilement of the old life was removed. Essene baptism, it is true, made genuine moral demands, but the obligations were entirely confined to the sect, there was no thought of an outgoing call, for the recipient of Essene baptism lived out his life in the spiritually rarified atmosphere of a religious community. Against all this we set the baptism of John, it was not a ceremonial washing, it did not merely demand that moral cleansing should be its preliminary condition, but it went far beyond this and demanded that a clean and holy life, lived in the world and in the expectation of the immediate appearance of the kingdom of God, should be its outcome (cf. Luke 3.7-14).

John's baptism thus came as a challenge to both Jew and Gentile to prepare for this eschatological event. It stood both as an act of purification and the seal of the inner moral cleansing in readiness for the separation, the winnowing, of the approaching crisis. Says Bultmann, 'whoever submitted himself to it, and to the obligations of repentance bound up with it, purified himself for the coming Kingdom of God, and belonged to the company of those who would escape the day of wrath and judgment'.³⁶ No doubt to many it recalled the words of the prophet that there would be a time when,

'a fountain shall be opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness' (Zech. 13.1),

or again they would think of the words of Ezekiel,

'I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean. . . . A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you' (Ezek. 36.25ff.).

In a sense the baptism of John was an amplification of the teaching of the prophets with their continual insistence upon

the ethical demands of a righteous God. In this respect it is important to emphasise that, whatever may have been its immediate precursors, the baptism of John was thoroughly rooted in the Old Testament. His preaching pointed to the immediate fulfilment of the prophetic hopes in the bringing about of a new Exodus for the people of God.³⁷ It may well have been the case that John saw his ministry as the fulfilling of such passages as those already quoted and others such as Isaiah 1.15-17 where there is a close link between an act of washing and those moral requirements that would make it effective. (Other Old Testament parallels may be found at Jer. 2.22; 4.14; Psa. 51.7.) In the same way his pointing to the One who would baptise 'in Holy Spirit' (Mark 1.8) is to be seen, to some extent at least, as a realisation of those ancient promises that God's Spirit would be poured out in the last days upon His restored people (e.g. Ezek. 36.27, which links this with the cleansing washing of water, Isa. 44.3; Joel 2.28). John asserted that entry into the true covenant community, the true Israel, was not on racial grounds but upon the fulfilment of certain ethical requirements involving repentance as their prerequisite.³⁸ In view of the prevailing ideas among the Jewish people it was not surprising that John was asked by what right he treated Jews in this way (John 1.29) for they considered themselves already fit for the kingdom of God and the Messianic Age. They failed to realise that 'without an acknowledgment of one's personal uncleanness and without a change of mind there is no sharing in the Messianic promises'.³⁹

The baptism of John, however, was not merely ethical, it was, as we have already noted, strongly eschatological. It was a baptism related to the end time, it looked towards the coming of the kingdom of God and the establishment of the new covenant of the prophetic hope. This eschatological intention was emphasised by the fact that it was in the wilderness where John was baptising, for the wilderness was the place from which the last things were to commence. Here in the desert was the place where Israel was to be reborn and to be betrothed to God in a never to be ended engagement (Hos. 2.14-23). This expectation would be fulfilled but in a way not envisaged by John, for

out of his baptism of the Messiah a new and spiritual Israel would be founded from the true remnant of the old Israel. 'The expectations of the cleansing and purifying of a renewed people of God, ready for the new covenant, the constituting of the faithful Remnant to await the advent of the Messiah, and the preparation for the final judgment by which the elect should be winnowed out from the *massa perditionis* of the ungodly and gathered into God's storehouse — all these eschatological visions of the prophets are set forth visibly in the symbolism of John's rite of baptism'.⁴⁰ Like the prophets John looked forward to the coming crisis as the Day of Reckoning, the day when accounts would be finally settled, for to John, as it was to his predecessors, the Day of the Messiah was the Day of the Lord, and 'who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?' (Mal. 3.2).

The situation was thus critical, men were being faced in this rite of baptism with the great *Either-Or* — the choice was either repentance and water baptism, or else the fiery baptism of judgment at the coming of the Messiah. The fact that the coming of the kingdom of God was not quite as John had envisaged it, and indeed left him in doubt (Matt. 11.2-6), is quite beside the point. The final winnowing, the ultimate *eschaton*, the revelation of the glory and the judgment of the Son of Man is yet to be; but in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth the time of fulfilment dawned, the future age broke into the present age and the prophetic hopes were realised. At the same time in the baptism of John the separation of the true Israel from the mass of Jewry was begun, a separation made complete by the final division in the people caused by Christ.

The insistence upon repentance and a life consistent with the confession of sin were the prime characteristics of the baptism of John, and in this we see the foundations of the later arising Christian baptism. John's baptism pointed forward, it was a 'baptism of repentance for the remission of sins', and as Tertullian pointed out⁴¹ this phrase clearly points forward to a *future* remission, the advent of God's forgiveness in Christ. The preparation was realised as we have seen in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, in Him the kingdom of God became actual

in the world of men, and through Him the power of the kingdom of God was being exerted in an entirely new way. In Jesus the Christ God was about to create a new race of men, a new community in which the ideals and aspirations of Israel would be fulfilled. The end of John's baptism, in so far as its significance was concerned, thus came with the baptism of Jesus at his hands. John's baptism was primarily a preparation for the coming Christ, it prefigured the establishment of the new covenant in and through Him, but now He had come, the days were accomplished, the kingdom of God had drawn nigh. As G. W. H. Lampe puts it, "The great event which changed Johannine into Christian baptism was . . . the Baptism of Jesus regarded first, as both the Synoptists and the Fourth Gospel imply, as the foreshadowing and symbolical summing up of His mission as Son and Servant of God, of His death, resurrection and ascension and of the New Covenant to be inaugurated in these events, and, secondly, as an event which prefigured and made possible the Pentecostal fulfilment of the ancient hope of a universal outpouring of the Spirit upon the people of God'.⁴² Accordingly we must now turn to a brief account and consideration of the baptism of Jesus Himself, without which this brief survey of the backgrounds to Christian baptism would be incomplete.⁴³

The Baptism of the Lord

The submission of the Lord to the baptism of John was an event which was not without its difficulties for the early Church, and, superficially at least, it is certainly paradoxical that the one who is consistently presented as sinless in the New Testament records should have made this voluntary submission to a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. This bewilderment is reflected in the various emendations to the story found in some of the apocryphal gospels. The 'Gospel of the Hebrews' as quoted by Jerome⁴⁴ produces the following,

'Behold the mother of the Lord and his brethren said unto him,
'John the Baptist baptiseth unto the remission of sins, let us go

and be baptised of him". But he said unto them, "Wherein have I sinned that I should be baptised of him? Unless perhaps this very thing that I have said is a sin of ignorance".'

It is also clear from Matthew's account of the baptism that John himself was unable to comprehend the need for the Messiah's baptism (Matt. 3.15), but the answer that Jesus gives is sufficient to silence his questionings. The purpose of his baptism, explained Jesus, was 'to fulfil all righteousness' (*plērōsai pasan dikaiosunēn*),⁴⁵ and since it is possible to trace through the Gospel records His self-identification with the Servant of Yahweh of the Isaianic prophecy, it is highly probable that here in His baptism it was this picture that was before Him. The Servant was called to a mission which 'comprised three things: he must obey, he must witness, he must suffer. By so doing he would be carrying out God's redemptive purposes for Israel and the world'.⁴⁶ The Servant arose out of Israel, embodying all that Israel should have been, but beyond this lies the inescapable fact that the mission of the Servant could only be accomplished through suffering. It is here that the mission of the Lord becomes so obviously identifiable with that of the Servant. The righteous Servant would make many righteous and bear their iniquities (Isa. 53.11). Jesus, identified with this Servant of Yahweh, takes His stand with the people, identifying Himself with them and their repentance shown in their obedience to the baptism of John, and through His sinlessness fulfilling that which they could not. By identifying Himself with the faithful few of Israel Jesus stands as the Representative Man whose obedience unto death fulfils the lack of human obedience and thus mediates to man the divine forgiveness, forming in Himself a new community of the faithful. Such an identification was thus essential; Jesus had to be fully representative of the people, like the Servant He had to be numbered with the transgressors before seeing the fruit of His labours (Isa. 53.11ff.). This sacrificial motif is made more explicit by John who speaks of the 'Lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world' (John 1.29) in the context of the baptism and the descent of the Spirit.⁴⁷

The mission of the Servant which was to be fulfilled by Christ

is confirmed by the voice from heaven. Thus, in addition to His own subjective consciousness of His calling, there comes an objective pronouncement, the significance of which would have been well understood by the onlookers. Before discussing this, however, it is important to look at the event in the light of the concepts of contemporary Judaism. In Jewish thought God had gradually become completely 'wholly-other'; He was the Transcendent One whose very name was too holy to be mentioned and the prophetic consciousness of the immanence of God had been almost totally lost. God had been placed further and further away from human affairs so that in most cases He only took part in transactions with humans through intermediaries such as angels. Indeed, the growth of angelology in Judaism is paralleled by the development of ideas of God's 'wholly-otherness'. The angels formed a vital bridge of mediation between a transcendent God and His universe which would otherwise have been difficult to construct.⁴⁸ For the same reason there was also a tendency to personalise the attributes of God such as His wisdom and glory (*shekhinah*). Such an attitude towards God, taken in conjunction with the silence of the voice of prophecy, meant that in effect God no longer had direct dealings with His people; His voice was no longer heard directly, His revelation to man was complete in the Torah and it was here, through the interpretations of the rabbis, that God's voice was to be heard. It was said, however, that the holiest rabbis were allowed to hear the faint echo of God's voice as the *Bath Qol*, the 'daughter of a voice', but it was no longer the clear pronouncement that the prophets had heard.

It is thus not surprising that the Jews looked back with a sense of yearning and regret for the days of old, nor is it also surprising that they looked forward to a time when the voice of God would be heard again. Jewish hope could be expressed in the words of Isaiah 64.1 — 'O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down'. This was something that they believed would happen at the Last Day, the Day of the Messiah, when God's full and final deliverance would be seen. These are hopes which run through the apocalyptic literature, and may indeed be also found in the canonical prophets. When the Messiah came,

'The heavens shall be opened . . . with the Father's voice as from Abraham to Isaac . . . and the Spirit of Understanding shall rest upon him' (Test. Levi 18).

Or again,

'And the heavens shall be opened to him, to pour out the Spirit, even the blessing of the Father' (Test. Judah 24.2).

The baptism of Jesus would thus have been seen as a definite Messianic anointing, an event of genuine eschatological significance marking the beginning of the End.

The words of the heavenly voice, which came to the Lord, marked Jesus out as both Messianic Son and Suffering Servant. It is well noted by Cranfield that 'the voice does not proclaim Jesus' newly established status of sonship consequent upon his installation as Messiah; rather it confirms his already existing filial consciousness of being the Son of God, that is at the same time a confirmation of his Servant vocation'.⁴⁹ The anointing of the Holy Spirit is the public pronouncement and confirmation that Jesus is King-Messiah (cf. Acts 10.38), an announcement made in words that echo the divine decree from the old royal ceremonial (Psa. 2.7). Further, this anointing of the Spirit emphasises the eschatological nature of the baptism. The pouring out of the Spirit was to be the mark of the last days (Joel 2.28-32, etc.), but at this point it was only upon the One, the Representative Man, the Last Adam. The prophecy concerning the Servant that 'I shall put my Spirit upon him' (Isa. 42.1) had been fulfilled, but the general outpouring of the last days was reserved for the future, when through the suffering of the Servant and His vindication as Lord and Messiah, the new community would be inaugurated which would share in the Messianic unction.

The way of the Messiah was to be the way of humiliation, as we have already seen; the allusion to Isaiah 42.1 in the words of the voice from heaven demonstrate that His mission is only to be accomplished through suffering. The baptism thus marks the end of the long period of preparation and deepening experience,

and marks the beginning of His ministry, that way which was to lead to the full expression of His baptism at the hands of John in the baptism of His Passion. As Lampe has put it, the 'role of Servant which He undertakes at His Baptism is fulfilled, not in the Jordan, but at Calvary'.⁵⁰ Standing thus the Lord is to be seen as the true Remnant of Israel, the fulfilment of all that Israel should have been. Thus in Himself He, at one and the same time, both fulfils and brings to an end the old Israel with its national structure, and establishes the New Israel through the blood of the new covenant, foreshadowed in His baptism. This act was thus related to His dying and rising again, it pointed to the fact that the new covenant which He had come to establish and through which the new people of God would be created must be sealed in Messianic blood. It is significant that Jesus Himself speaks of His Passion in terms of His baptism. At Mark 10.38 the context speaks strongly of the Servant idea, and His death is 'the baptism that I am baptised with'. Again at Luke 12.50 the same thought is implicit in the words of the Lord. These are no accidental metaphors, the Evangelists make it clear that from the moment of His baptism Jesus was only too well aware of how His mission would end. Time and again He uses phraseology which demonstrates how He linked His task with that of the Suffering Servant, as the fulfilment of whom He had been shown forth by the banks of Jordan. As the Servant then His life, death and resurrection were representative, and, as we shall see later in this study, the Church's baptism unites it to His passion and resurrection, shown forth in His baptism. The scene by the Jordan is thus the setting for the whole Gospel story. Here the new covenant is shown in anticipation, entry into which, upon the basis of Christ's representative death and resurrection, is shown in our baptism, a baptism not merely for the forgiveness of sins, to which, unlike the anticipatory baptism of John, it can look back, but one with which is associated the Messianic gift of the Spirit. This gift was again prefigured in the baptism of Jesus, and through it the Risen Lord continues to impart His life to His Church, the new community of the new humanity, expressing also the unity of all in the redemptive act of Christ.⁵¹

NOTES

1. R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, (ET 1960) p. 187. See also the monumental volume of F. Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, (ET 1911).
2. Cf. Livy 39.5 where Dionysian baptism is called a 'pure washing'. Note also Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.23, Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.11, etc.
3. Philo, *De Cherubim* 95.
4. Cf. Tertullian, *De Bapt.* 5, etc. By the time of Hippolytus such pagan influences were well marked (see S. Angus, *Religious Quests of the Graeco-Roman World* (1929) pp. 150ff.). On the other hand there is also the possibility that the mysteries might be in debt (without acknowledgment) to Christianity, a situation by no means impossible. It would certainly seem, for instance, that the sacral baptisms of blood associated with the worship of Attis and Mithras were post-Christian, and may even have been instituted by way of rivalry to Christianity.
5. For a further discussion of the origins of baptism see *TWNT*, i. pp. 530ff. (s.v. *baptō* etc.) and also J. Thomas, *Le Mouvemente Baptiste en Palestine et Syrie* (1935). He sees Jewish practice as ultimately derived, not from Greek ideas, but Persian. He believes that Zoroastrian influences were very strong on the development of Jewish concepts in general and on the derivation of baptism in particular.
6. J. Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, (ET 1960) p. 24. While recognising that not all share in this judgment (e.g. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (1962), it would seem to the present writer that the onus of proof rests with those who do not derive Christian baptism historically from the Jewish parallels.
7. See *SB* i. pp. 102ff. Jeremias also amasses an impressive list of authorities for this view (*op. cit.* p. 29n.) A. Oepke also notes that 'it is hardly conceivable that the Jewish ritual should be adopted at a time when baptism had become an established religious practice in Christianity. . . . Proselyte baptism must have preceded Christian baptism', (*TWNT*, i. p. 535).
8. *Yebhamoth* 47ab, and note also 46a.
9. Rabbinical Judaism at this time was divided into two main schools of thought, namely the 'School of Hillel' and the 'School of Shammai'. These were the last and best known of the five pairs of great teachers and flourished at the end of the first century BC during the reign of Herod the Great. Hillel was noted for his humility and leniency and believed in expressing the larger intent of Scripture rather than being bound to merely literal and limited applications, the viewpoint of Shammai. The latter formed an admirable counterpart to Hillel, he represented the more conservative tradition, tended to be somewhat rigid in his decisions and rigorous in his exclusivism. Numerous stories are told illustrating the different viewpoints of the two great teachers (see *ṭṭ* *Shabbath* 31a and f.). Paul's teacher Gamaliel was the leading Hillelite rabbi of the day and it was the Hillelite interpretation of the Law which became the basis for normative Judaism.
10. *Yebhamoth* 46b.
11. *Kerithot* 9a.

12. N. Clark, *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments* (1956) p. 10.
13. For further details see A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, (1908) pp. 745ff., also I. Abrahams, 'How Did the Jews Baptise?' *JTS* (1910) II. pp. 609ff., and the more recent study of T. F. Torrance, 'Proselyte Baptism', *NTS*, (1954) I. 2. pp. 150ff.
14. It seems clear that Jewish baptism was self-administered, being in the nature of a 'purificatory bath'. Was this perhaps in Paul's mind when he speaks of the *loutron palingenesias* (Titus 3.5)? The Old Testament background seems to be Isa. 1.16. Cf. also Sib. Orac. 3.592ff., and note *TWNT*, i. pp. 545f. (s.v. *baptistēs*).
15. *Yebhamoth* 47f.
16. *Yebhamoth* 48b. and cf. also 22a and 98a. There is a full discussion of this terminology in G. F. Moore, *Judaism* (1927) pp. 334f.
17. There is a very clear and close similarity between Jewish and Christian terminology. John 3.5 is especially reminiscent of Jewish baptismal expressions. See J. Jeremias, *op. cit.* p. 36 for further correspondences which provide strong evidence for the rich Jewish heritage of early Christianity.
18. Sib. Orac. 4.165-167. G. W. H. Lampe, (*The Seal of the Spirit*, (1951) p. 24) regards this as a doubtful allusion to baptism but see J. Jeremias, *op. cit.* pp. 33ff.
19. G. Gloege, (*The Day of His Coming*, (ET 1963) p. 95) has remarked that 'the burden consisted in the fact that the Torah was understood as a collection of individual stipulations'. There were understood to be 613 separate commands, 248 positive and 365 negative; there were the difficult (heavy) and easy (light) commands and so forth. These were amplified and applied to every situation of life by the oral tradition. It is small wonder that Christ censured the legalism of the Pharisees! On the other hand, as Professor F. F. Bruce has remarked to the present writer, where religion is conceived in terms of law such a development is inevitable. While the rank and file, like Peter, found the system to be a yoke which neither they nor their fathers could bear, there was an even greater danger in the spiritual realm for those who, like Paul and the rich young ruler, succeeded, by infinite painstaking, in keeping the whole and were tempted to think that thus they had fulfilled all God's requirements.
20. Hegesippus gives a list of seven sects within Judaism of which the Essenes were only one (quoted in Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 4.22.7). We should no doubt view the Essenes not as a single sharply defined group, but as a broad movement of various local forms, but all holding certain attitudes and views in common.
21. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.5.9, 18.1.5, *Bell.* 2.129, etc. and Philo, *Quod Omn. Pro.* 12.13.
22. The literature on the Qumran Community and the Dead Sea Scrolls is now immense. Probably the best introduction to the subject is F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (1961). While not all scholars would agree with the dating we have given, all would connect the movement with the pronounced separatist tendencies to be seen in the period of the Hasmonean monarchy.
23. G. Gloege, *op. cit.* p. 92.

24. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts*, (1960) p. 55. See also L. H. Silberman, 'The Two Messiahs in the Manual of Discipline', *VT* (1955) 5. pp. 77ff. and *SB* i. pp. 12ff. on the Zadokite Document. This expectation does not seem to have been confined to Qumran but appears elsewhere in the apocalyptic literature, cf. e.g. Test. Levi 8.12ff., Test. Benjamin 9.2, etc.
25. F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (1961) p. 79
26. Manual of Discipline 3.4ff. (All quotations from the Qumran Texts are from T. H. Gaster, *The Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect*, (1957).
27. Manual of Discipline 5.13.
28. Like the prophets and earlier teachers in Judaism the Qumran Sectaries believed that sin polluted the flesh in the same way that 'unclean' objects would. There is thus a certain element of ritual cleansing involved in these washings (see Zadokite Document 10.10-13).
29. Manual of Discipline 4.20, 21.
30. G. Gloege, *op. cit.* p. 87.
31. We may note two suggestive references, the *anabainōn* of Mark 1.10 and Matt. 3.16 and the *hodata polla hēn ekei* of John 3.23.
32. G. B. Caird, St. Luke in *PGC*, (1963) p. 70.
33. F. W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ*, (1892 edn.) pp. 52f.
34. See further on this M. Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, (1956) pp. 328ff., H. H. Rowley, 'The Baptism of John and the Qumran Sect' in *New Testament Essays* (Ed. A. J. B. Higgins), (1959) pp. 218ff. (Cf. his earlier essay 'Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John' (1940) now published in *From Moses to Qumran*, (1963) pp. 211ff.), and also J. A. T. Robinson, 'The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community' (1957) now in *Twelve New Testament Studies*, (1962).
35. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, (ET 1955) p. 23.
36. R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, (ET 1958 edn.) p. 26.
37. On this H. Sahlin can write, 'the baptism of John was a sacramental representation of the historical Exodus of Israel and, at the same time, an introduction to the New Exodus of salvation'. ('The New Exodus of Salvation according to St. Paul' in *The Root of the Vine* (Ed. A. Fridrichsen) (1953) p. 89). This may be something of an overstatement but it points to the important fact that the concept of the Exodus has moulded the thought of the New Testament writers in their understanding of the work of Christ to a very great extent.
38. Thus John's baptism is called *baptisma metanoias* (Mark 1.4, etc.). Note also Josephus' estimate, John was 'a good man who taught the Jews to cultivate virtue through justice towards each other and piety towards God, and so come together for baptism (*baptismō(i) sumienai*). Immersion would be acceptable to God only if they made use of it, not for the remission of some sins only, but to purify the body when the soul was already pure through righteousness' (*Ant.* 18.5.2).
39. J. Warns, *Baptism*, (ET 1957) p. 19.
40. G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* pp. 31f.
41. Tertullian, *De Bapt.* 10.
42. G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* p. 33.

43. On the Baptism of John see further W. F. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism*, (1948) pp. 3-24, and G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* pp. 19-32.
44. Jerome, *Dial. against Pelagius* 3.2 (in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, (1958 edn.) p. 6).
45. The word *dikaïosunē* has a wide range of meaning from 'justice' to thoughts of moral integrity. In this context the idea seems to be, not merely 'what is right', but 'all that God requires' (so ΝΕΒ). Thus 'in presenting himself for baptism, Jesus emphasises as his task . . . right conduct which he will fulfil and which will be pleasing to God' (*TWNT* ii. p. 198). There is thus an emphasis on relationships, on that which will follow the will of God and be pleasing and acceptable to Him. This in no way negates our argument, since it was simply this failure of Israel to do what God required of them that necessitated the ministry of the Servant to fulfil their lack.
46. A. T. Hanson, *The Church of the Servant*, (1962) p. 27. For a full discussion of the Servant prophecies see C. R. North, *The Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah*, (1956) and the less technical and shorter study of H. L. Ellison, *The Servant of Jehovah*, (nd).
47. For a fuller discussion of this see the present writer's article 'Passover and Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel' *SYTh.*, (1967) 20. 3. pp. 329ff.
48. See further on this development D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, (1964) pp. 235ff.
49. C. E. B. Cranfield, St. Mark in *CGTC*, (1963) p. 55.
50. G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* p. 38. Note also that John saw his ministry as associated with the Servant (John 1.23, etc.).
51. The concept that the baptism of Jesus was a representative and universal baptism with which our own baptism unites us is worked out by O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, (1950) pp. 23ff., and also by J. A. T. Robinson, 'The One Baptism' in *Twelve New Testament Studies*, (1962) pp. 158ff. On the baptism of the Lord see further W. F. Flemington, *op. cit.* pp. 25ff., and G. W. H. Lampe, *op. cit.* pp. 33-45. See also the writer's study, 'The Baptism of Jesus and its Present Significance' *EQ* (1967) xxxix 3. (July) pp. 131ff.