

Chapter 1

The Testimony of the Early Church Fathers

I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

-1 Corinthians 11:2

John Calvin made the following observation regarding the origin of the practice of infant baptism:

The opponents of infant baptism spread among the simple folk the notion that many years passed after Christ's resurrection during which infant baptism was unknown. In this they are most shamefully untruthful. For indeed, there is no writer, however ancient, who does not regard its origin in the apostolic age as a certainty (Calvin 1960, 2:1331).

Despite such an emphatic statement by the Geneva Reformer, so well-versed in early Christian literature, the "notion" which Calvin regarded as "shamefully untruthful" has made further inroads into the modern church. Kurt Aland, Professor at the University of Münster, promulgated such a "notion" in his book entitled "*Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?*".

It can be no accident . . . that all our information about the existence of infant baptism comes from the period between AD 200 and 250. At that time we hear of its observance in Africa, Palestine, and Italy; in each case the way in which it is spoken of conveys the impression that the practice takes its rise at the end of the second century. For the time before this we do not possess a single piece of

information that gives concrete testimony to the existence of infant baptism (1963, 101).

Opponents of infant baptism frequently cite Tertullian as the first witness to such a practice, and it is thereby commonly assumed that infant baptism originated near the end of the second century. Hailed as the "father of Latin theology," Tertullian (160?-230? A.D.), wrote a treatise entitled *De baptismo* to counter the efforts of a woman of the Cainite sect who sought to bring an end to Christian baptism (Bridge & Phypers 1977, 73). Tertullian advocated delaying baptism until the children were old enough to request it.

Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the "remission of sins?" More caution will be exercised in worldly matters: so that one who is *not* trusted with earthly substance *is* trusted with divine! Let them know how to "ask" for salvation, that you may seem (at least) to have given "to him that asketh" (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 3:678).

Tertullian's words, first of all, attest to a practice that had become commonplace in his day (Hastings 1919, 136). To be sure, Aland insisted that "Tertullian's *De baptismo* was directed against something *new*" (1963, 69). David Wright, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Edinburgh, in his *Scottish Journal* article "The origins of infant baptism--child believers' baptism?", adroitly observed, however, that "novelty is one argument that Tertullian does *not* level against [infant] baptism" (1987, 7).

Second, Tertullian apparently failed to see the connection between baptism and circumcision (the latter administered to infant males according to Genesis 17:12). Curiously, in the context of acknowledging that Abraham had not been baptized, Tertullian made no reference to Abraham's circumcision. The following statement from Tertullian seems to imply that Abraham was not given an outward sign in tandem with the righteousness that was his by faith.

Grant that, in days gone by, there was salvation by means of bare faith, before the passion and resurrection of the Lord. But now that faith has been enlarged, and is become a faith which believes in His nativity, passion, and resurrection, there has been an amplification added to the sacrament, viz., the sealing act of baptism; the clothing in some sense, of the faith which before was bare, and which cannot exist now without its proper law (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 3:676).

Tertullian's failure to mention Old Testament circumcision as a sign and seal, as per Romans 4:11, coupled with his suggestion that Old Testament faith was "bare" with respect to outward sign is puzzling. It was also to miss the connection which the apostle Paul made between baptism and circumcision (Col. 2:11-12). On the surface of things, Tertullian's perspective might seem to lend credence to David Wright's claim that "No writer in the first two centuries used Col. 2:11-12 to relate circumcision positively to baptism" (1987, 40:19). Wright, however, apparently overlooked the fact that Justin Martyr had explicitly related the Old and New Testament ordinances. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin, the outstanding apologist of the second century, compared New Testament baptism with Old Testament circumcision.

And we, who have approached God through Him, have received not carnal, but spiritual circumcision, which Enoch and those like him observed. And we have received it through baptism, since we were sinners, by God's mercy; and all men may equally obtain it (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 1:216).

But then how does one explain Tertullian's statement that prior to the passion and resurrection of the Lord "there was salvation by means of bare faith"? One possible explanation would be that Tertullian had in mind Paul's statement about Abraham in Romans 4:11: "He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of

the righteousness that he had by faith *while he was still uncircumcised*" (italics mine). Focusing on Paul's distinction between Abraham's imputed righteousness and the sign which later sealed it, Tertullian may have concluded that salvation in the Old Testament was "by means of bare faith" whereas New Testament salvation was more closely associated with water baptism as attested by such passages as Mark 16:16, Acts 22:16, Ephesians 5:26, Hebrews 10:22, and 1 Peter 3:2. In Tertullian's day baptism was taken much more seriously. Church historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette, wrote,

. . . baptism was believed to wash away all sins committed before it was administered. After baptism, the Christian was supposed not to sin, and some sins, if indulged in after that rite had been administered, were regarded as unforgivable. Tertullian listed the "seven deadly sins" as "idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, fornication, false-witness, and fraud." Both Hermas and Tertullian conceded that forgiveness might be had for one such sin committed after baptism, but allowed only one (1953, 138).

Tertullian recommended the deferral of baptism not only with respect to infants, but also with respect to single young adults—as though through a promiscuous lapse they might use up all the credit on their baptismal certificate! And apostates could only be saved by a second baptism--the blood baptism of martyrdom! (Bainton 1984, 42; Buswell 1962, 2:265).

This third point is significant because the nineteenth-century Antipaedobaptist, Alexander Carson, accounted for the origin of infant baptism in the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

There is nothing more obvious to a candid mind, than the origin of the early introduction of infant baptism. As soon as baptism was looked upon as essential to salvation, infant baptism would naturally follow ([1853] 1981, 189).

To try to account for the origin of infant baptism by the rise of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, however, hardly squares with the fact that Tertullian *objected* to infant baptism *on the basis of* baptismal regeneration when he argued that serious sins committed after baptism could not be forgiven (Gallagher 1878, 161-163).

The fourth thing that must be said in regard to Tertullian's postponement of infant baptism is that, in the passage cited from his *De baptismo*, Tertullian was speaking within the context of the church's practice of baptizing children from pagan families with Christian sponsors standing in as spiritual parents. Joachim Jeremias, Professor of Theology at the University of Gottingen, noted that Tertullian, commenting on 1 Corinthians 7:14 in his *De Anima*, actually endorsed infant baptism.

While in the first passage quoted (*De Baptismo* 18) Tertullian had spoken of the children of pagans joining the Church, he is speaking in our passage of the "children of believers" including the children of mixed marriages. Of them he says that by their birth they are "marked out for holiness and therewith for salvation"; they are however, according to John 3:5 only made holy by baptism (39.4). Until baptism their soul is in Adam (and consequently burdened with original sin) and impure (40.1). Clearly Tertullian here does not only presuppose the practice of baptism, but he advocates it. The reservations expressed in *De Baptismo* 18 were not extended by Tertullian to cover the baptism of the children of Christian parents; perhaps he had gone so far as to drop them altogether (Jeremias 1962, 84-85).

Upon closer inquiry, therefore, the main candidate of support for those who would deny the early practice of infant baptism, actually endorsed its practice.

Aland questioned Jeremias's collating of passages from Tertullian's *De Anima* and insisted that Tertullian's frequent statements, whereby he associated repentance and fasting with

baptism, implicitly ruled out infants as candidates for baptism (1963, 65-68). Aland seemed oblivious to the fact that modern proponents of infant baptism similarly link baptism and repentance. Aland's reasoning, not surprisingly, resembled that of the English Baptist and Principal of Spurgeon's College in London, G. R. Beasley-Murray, who provided the impetus for Aland's study (Aland 1963, 10) and who wrote the Introduction to Aland's book. These are modern Baptist arguments which ignore the divinely-instituted structure of the family and which reflect egalitarian thought patterns. Spiritual requirements affixed to baptism, in themselves, pose no valid historical argument against infant baptism, however they may have posed a pragmatic argument, for Tertullian, in the case of the unbeliever's offspring.

Aland disputed Jeremias's contention that Tertullian in *De baptismo* had in mind primarily the baptism of converts, and that the infants being considered were the children of pagans. Yet, Aland himself belittled Tertullian's argument which, simply stated, was that sponsors took an unnecessary risk in infant baptism since their death could hinder the fulfillment of their vows on the children's behalf (1963, 62-63). Since Aland's belittlement of Tertullian's argument concerning sponsors, demonstrates that he was familiar with it, even calling it into question, it was a bit incongruous for him to deny that Tertullian was focusing on the children of pagans (who needed sponsors) in *De baptismo*.

Since Tertullian *did* allow infant baptism in the event that the infant's life appeared to be in danger, we can fairly conclude with Jeremias that Tertullian, in *De baptismo*, "did not in principle contest the legitimacy [of infant baptism], but only the expediency" (Jeremias 1962, 83). Such was the conclusion of the eminent church historian, Philip Schaff, as J. Oliver Buswell noted:

Among the fathers, Tertullian himself not excepted--for he combats only its expediency--there is not a single voice against the lawfulness and the apostolic origin of infant baptism (Buswell 1962, 2:264-5).

An examination of the early centuries of the church fails to turn up any outcry of protest against the practice of infant baptism--it simply was not an issue that created controversy.

Karl Boehm made the following observation in his *Lights and Shadows in the Present Condition of the Church*:

Considering the conscientiousness of severity with which the bishops of the first centuries resisted every innovation and change from the apostolic practice, and that they allowed authority to nothing save that which came down to them from the Apostles, it must have been impossible in so important a matter as baptism, that so great an innovation as that of infant baptism (were it an innovation) could have been universally introduced without much contention and opposition (Christensen 1973, 12).

Although there is no evidence of any protest movement against infant baptism in the early centuries, there are a number of early witnesses to the practice. While their number is not overwhelming, they are quite representative of the church and their reputation sufficient to establish the matter on solid historical grounds.

Richard Baxter argued convincingly that the practice of sponsorship for the children of unbelievers was well under way by the middle of the second century. The seventeenth-century English Puritan pastor stated,

The Currant Concert of Historians assures us, that *Hyginus* Bishop of Rome did first ordain God-fathers and God-mothers, at the Baptizing of Infants. . . . Making no question of their Baptism itself, but mentioning it as a casual practice and undoubted duty. (Nor doth any other History speak of any beginning of it since the Apostles times.) Now *Hyginus* lived as *Dan. Paraus* saith, *Anno Dom.* 154. as *Helvicus*, 152. as *Prideax*, 150. as *Fasciculus Temporis*, 141. as *Onuphris*, 138. But as *Nicephorus* before them saith (*Eccles. Histor.* 1.3.c.25) in the first

year of Emperor *Anto. Pius*; which was according to Helvicus himself 137. . . . so that *Hyginus* and the Church in his dayes living but about 40 years after St. John, and conversing, if not with the Apostles themselves (as some did) yet at least with the apostles Disciples and Familiars, is it possible they should so generally be ignorant, whether the apostles baptized Infants?

To be sure, in "a doctrinal point" or a "bare narration of some fact" a mistake was possible.

But in a matter of Fact, and of so publike notice, and which so many thousands were partakers in, as Baptism was, how could they be so ignorant? Were not many hundred then alive that could tell what the apostles did as having seen them? and knew whether themselves or their Parents were baptized in Infancy or not? (1651, A-4, 5?)

If Aland had been aware of this historical testimony concerning Hyginus, he may not have so readily insisted that "indubitable testimonies for the practice of infant baptism in the Christian Church first begin in the third century" (1963, 46).

Origen, the renowned theologian, apologist, and textual critic from Alexandria, referred to infant baptism as the custom of the church in his *Homilies on Luke*, *Homilies on Leviticus*, and *Commentary on Romans*. Jeremias wrote,

In all three places Job 14:14 f. (LXX) appears among the scriptural proofs adduced by Origen: "No one is pure from stain, yea though he be but one day old."

The quotation of this verse left no doubt that Origen was referring to infants when he used the Greek *παιδια* (Lat. *parvuli*). In another passage Origen quoted Matthew 18:10 linking it to infant baptism (Jeremias 1962, 65).

Origen wrote around A.D. 240 that "the church received a tradition from the Apostles to give baptism to infants"

[*Commentary on Romans*, V.ix.3.] (Christenson 1973, 11). Early church historian and bishop of Caesarea, Eusebius (ca. 260-ca. 340), noted in his *Ecclesiastical History* that Origen's family had been Christians for several generations. This would mean that at least Origen's father had been baptized as an infant, and probably his grandfather too. Since Origen was born in A.D. 185, Origen's testimony concerning infant baptism would push the practice back at least to the first half of the second century A.D. Origen had traveled to "Rome, Greece, Western Syria, Cappadocia, and the parts of adjoining Palestine." Though born in Egypt, he spent the latter part of his life in Palestine. His statements concerning infant baptism were written in Palestine. In view of his Christian heritage, his travels, and his stature in the ancient church, his testimony should not be taken lightly (Jeremias 1962, 65-66, 70).

Kurt Aland appeared not to have given careful examination to Eusebius's historical testimony concerning the Christian ancestry of Origen. Aland indicated that whether Origen's father "had been a Christian from *youth* is not so much as hinted at in the sources, so far as my knowledge goes. Not a word stands in them about his grandfather" (1963, 48). This was surprisingly poor scholarship on Aland's part, for Eusebius indeed conveyed the notion that generations were involved, and not merely Origen's singular, immediate father. Eusebius employed the Greek words *ἐκ προγονῶν* which were translated into the Latin by Rufinus as *ab avis atque atavis* (Jeremias 1962, 66). The exact form of the pertinent Greek word *προγονῶν* was also used by Paul in 2 Timothy 1:3: "I thank God, whom I serve, as my *forefathers* did. . ." (NIV italics mine). The Greek word is similarly rendered "forefathers" in the King James Version, the New English Bible, the New American Standard Bible, and the Phillips translation. While the Revised Standard used the term "fathers," the New Revised Standard Version improved it to "ancestors." In other words, Origen's Christian roots could be traced to his forefathers, in a way that was somewhat analogous to Paul's Jewish ancestry. He was not a first-generation Christian, nor merely a second-generation Christian. The family had been Christians for several generations.

Eusebius, who played a prominent role at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, was certainly in a better position than twentieth-century scholar, Kurt Aland, to get at "the sources" and write accurately about Origen's family background. It is noteworthy that Eusebius was the bishop of Caesarea, for it was in that city that Origen had been ordained a presbyter and spent the latter part of his life until his imprisonment and death during the Decian persecution (Roberts 4:226-228).

Aland regarded references in Origen's writings to infant baptism as evidence that the practice "*is not very old*" on the grounds that "Origen has to enter into discussion with them time and time again." "The arguments against it have not yet been silenced." Aland inferred from Origen's writings that infant baptism was first introduced "about the end of the second century" (1963, 49).

Aland's argument in this case can hardly be considered an historical argument. In effect, Aland considered the historical testimony of Origen a blatant lie fabricated for the purpose of reinforcing the practice of infant baptism as the official church order of the day. Aland's case may more accurately be described, therefore, as an *anti-historical* argument, for he preferred his own hypothetical inferences, to Origen's explicit testimony concerning a tradition received from the apostles. This is especially the case inasmuch as the "arguments" against infant baptism (which Aland claimed had not been silenced in Origen's day) were exaggerated, if not fabricated, in Aland's mind. Origen's quotations, listed as footnotes by Aland, simply do not bear the polemical tone which Aland ascribed to them; consequently, they offer no hint of any opposition to infant baptism.

Aland's *modus operandi* as a student of early church history too often resembled the modern method of Gospel study known as *Formgeschichte*, or "form criticism." According to the Form Critics,

the Gospels in their present form are not the records of a historical Jesus, nor the products of contemporary reporters who wrote down what they

saw Jesus do and heard Him say. They are the product of the believing Christian church of a generation later, and they reflect the life and faith of that community rather than the actual situation of Jesus' life. . . .

. . . . This does not mean that there is nothing of historical worth in the Gospels, for at the beginning of the process is admittedly a sound historical tradition. This historical base was however so transformed in a generation of oral repetition that only through the exercise of form criticism can one sift out the trustworthy historical residue from the later unhistorical accretions (Ladd 1967, 145-146).

Form Critics have argued that the triune baptismal command of Matthew 28:19 really did not represent the actual words of Jesus, but consisted of the church's later creedal formulation which, in turn, was written into the Gospel record as though it came from the mouth of our Lord. Beasley-Murray echoed the Form Critics when he stated, ". . . it is hard not to feel that Mt. 28:19 *in its present form* is a liturgical formula" (1962, 83). Aland employed this same form-critical methodology as an historian.

A. J. Maclean, in his article on "Baptism" in the *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, stated that infant baptism was probably in force at least as early as 69 A.D. noting that Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, said at his martyrdom in 155 A.D. that he had served Christ for 86 years. Polycarp, accordingly, would have been baptized as an infant or small child (Hastings 1919, 136). Polycarp is an important witness in this case because he had sat under the teaching of the beloved apostle John.

In his *First Apology* [15.6], written approximately 150 A.D., Justin Martyr spoke of men and women between the ages of 60 and 70 who had been "made disciples" from childhood. Justin used the same Greek word for "made disciples" as Jesus used in his Great Commission statement in Matthew 28:18 where baptism represented the first stage of disciple-making. While not

conclusive, it can reasonably be supposed that those men and women, to whom Justin referred, had received baptism during infancy or early childhood.

To be sure, the immediately preceding arguments related to Polycarp's longevity as a Christian, and the "disciples" to whom Justin referred, do not in themselves prove infant baptism. For it could be argued, and is argued, by the opponents of infant baptism, that these disciples simply were baptized after conscious faith and confession of Christ in early childhood. However incomplete when standing by themselves, when placed alongside the explicit statements of Origen, Cyprian, Hippolytus, and even Tertullian, these testimonies make a strong statement. Aland, however, applied the same tenuous logic to Justin Martyr as he did to Tertullian, arguing that Justin's insistence on the seeking of forgiveness, fasting, and prayers, as preconditions of baptism, presupposed "adults exclusively" (1963, 55).

Aland thought he had proven his case in his appeal to the early second-century *Apology* of Aristides, 15.6:

Now they instruct the servants and maids or the children, when any of them have such, that they become Christians on account of the love which they have for them. And when they have become Christians they call them brothers without distinction (Aland 1963, 57).

From Aland's perspective, this quotation proved that infant baptism could not have been the custom among Christian parents during the first decades of the second century. But was Aland really convinced when he said, ". . . a baptism of these children while still infants is excluded, even though they come from Christian families."? There is no mention of baptism in this passage from Aristides. For this reason, Aland could only say, ". . . it *appears* [italics mine] to me really to speak of baptism."

Aland stated categorically that the passage could not be translated as if the children mentioned were the children of the "servants" and "maidservants," noting four other scholars who

shared his interpretation. Yet, in seeming contradiction, he stated in a footnote that the Greek "possibly (and rightly?)" related the key words (translated "when . . . they have" but more accurately, in my judgment, "if . . . they have") "only to the servants and maidservants" (1963, 57).

However the Aristides passage be taken—whether the children mentioned belonged to the household servants or their masters, it would be stretching the point to say the passage proved that infants were not baptized in the second century. The passage simply describes evangelistic efforts of the early Christians with their domestic servants and with either their own children or their servants' children. For even if the children mentioned in the Aristides passage belonged to the Christian masters, that hardly proves that they were not baptized in their infancy or minority. It could simply indicate that the Christian masters recognized the importance of all their offspring making a conscious commitment and personal confession of faith following their baptism as infants or minority-age children. Neither would it rule out other minority-age children from having made a conscious commitment and public confession of Christ at the time of their baptism. Jeremias, collating several passages from Aristides, came to a different conclusion from that of Aland. While Aland challenged Jeremias's conclusion (Aland 1963, 55-58), Aland's ambivalence on the matter, evidenced by his footnote, certainly casts doubt on his own antipaedobaptistic credibility as it relates to Aristides *Apology*.

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, in his treatise *Against Heretics* (ca. A.D. 180) specifically mentioned infants, children, boys, youths, and old men as among those whom Jesus came to save by giving them new birth (Hastings 1919, 136). The following is the full quotation:

...He [Christ] came to save all through himself; all, that is, who through him are born into God, infants, children, boys, young men and old. Therefore he passed through every stage of life: he was made an infant for infants, sanctifying infancy; a child among children, sanctifying those of this age, an example

also to them of filial affection, righteousness and obedience; a young man amongst young men, an example to them, and sanctifying them to the Lord. So also amongst the older men; that he might be a perfect master for all, not solely in regard to the revelation of the truth, but also in respect of each stage of life. And then he came even unto death that he might be 'the firstborn from the dead, holding the pre-eminence among all' (Col.1:18), the Prince of Life, before all and preceding all (Bettensen 1963, 43).

Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp, is regarded as the "earliest theologian of distinction in the rising Old Catholic Church" (Walker [1918] 1952, 65). William Wall estimated his birth at approximately A.D. 97, four years before the death of the apostle John ([1705] 1889, 39), though modern scholars prefer a later date ranging from 115 to 142 (Walker [1918] 1952, 65). In keeping with the established terminology of the second-century church, Irenaeus described baptism as "regeneration into God." This fact coupled with the above quotation, in which he applied regeneration ("born into God") to infants, makes him a strong witness to the practice of infant baptism. Indeed, he "presupposes it as an 'unquestioned practice of the Church'" (Jeremias 1962, 73).

Aland's attempt to refute Jeremias's conclusions regarding Irenaeus's witness to infant baptism savors of special pleading. Aland insisted that Irenaeus was

concerned solely with the fact that Jesus sanctified all humanity in that he was made like all. . . . Nothing more than this is presupposed; nothing more than this is stated; therefore nothing more than this should be sought from it (1963, 59).

Aland's summary of Irenaeus's profound words, as that "Jesus sanctified all humanity," is in itself sufficient to establish Jeremias' conclusions. For it is clear that the "all," to be consistent with Irenaeus's explicit statement, could not exclude

the age of infancy. Unless Aland's intention was arbitrarily to rule out all connectedness of Irenaeus's thought, his summary statement must be seen to reinforce, rather than contradict, the conclusion of Jeremias and many others, that Irenaeus presented a strong historical witness to infant baptism.

Tertullian's protégé, Cyprian of Carthage (along with 66 other bishops), affirmed the practice of baptizing infants; he also spoke of the church's custom of admitting little children to communion (Wall [1705] 1889, 64; Jeremias 1962, 85).

Now Cyprian was Bishop of Carthage 150 years after the death of St. John at the utmost; and so was like to live near 100 years of John: and could a whole Council, and all the Church be ignorant whether Infants were wont to be baptized 100 years before? when some of themselves or their Fathers were those Infants? Yea, could it be so forgotten, as that none should doubt of it (Baxter 1651, A-4)?

Roman bishop, Hippolytus, is considered the first "anti-pope" because of his open opposition to the lax moral views of Callistos who preceded him (Smith 1993, 31). But on the issue of infant baptism, his position was clear. About A.D. 215 Hippolytus issued the following church directive:

First, the little ones should be baptized. All who can speak for themselves should speak. For those however who cannot, their parents or another who belongs to the family should speak (Christensen 1973, 11).

Aland affirmed the testimony of Cyprian and the 66 bishops as "in every respect" a "completely valid testimony" concerning not only the universal church rule, but the universal *requirement*, of infant baptism in Africa at that time (1963, 47). But he regarded the appeal to antiquity associated with Hippolytus's *Church Order (Apostolic Tradition)* much as he viewed the same claim associated with the *Didache (The*

Teaching of the Twelve). For Aland, it represented an attempt to solve the problems of the day by putting the solution "in the mouth of the apostles or of the Lord." He viewed it as reflecting a church order beginning no earlier than the end of the second century (1963, 50-51), thus, attributing the same kind of fabrication to Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition* that he attributed to the testimony of Origen. This was another example in which Aland applied the principles of form-criticism to the task of interpreting early church history. The irony is that Aland appealed to the *Didache* to bolster his case that infants were excluded from baptism by the very nature of the instruction associated with it (1963, 54).

Aland regarded the description of Hippolytus's baptismal procedure, whereby children and infants were to be baptized first, as incongruent with Jeremias's concept of the "missionary baptism" of a whole family. "Only a full Christian is in a position to answer for others at baptism" (1963, 51-52). Aland was a bit over-zealous to discredit Jeremias's "missionary baptism" concept in this case, for once the head of the house had made a profession of faith in Christ, it would have been quite "apostolic" for the church to baptize the youngest first in keeping with Jesus' focus on "the least of these" (Matt. 25:40; Heb. 8:11). For the old order of things had proven itself defective (John 8:9), and family order would not have been threatened by this manner of symbolizing the spiritual principle that "a little child will lead them" (Isa. 11:6).

If the order for the Baptizer, as described in Malachi 4:6, meant anything, the hearts of the fathers must first be turned to their children before the hearts of the children would ever be turned to the fathers. That was not only fundamental for an adult's becoming a "full Christian," since such a turning was the spiritual posture of repentance (Matt. 18:2-5), but it may well have been employed to establish true family order in the process.

By appealing to the third-century burial inscription of one 12-year-old Marcianus of Rome who was baptized one day before he died, Aland claimed to have proven conclusively that not all children of Christian parents were baptized as infants.

Noting the distinctively Christian nature of the inscription, Aland claimed that "the possibility of pagan parents" was "absolutely to be rejected" (1963, 76-79). On that basis, he thought he had discredited the testimony both of Cyprian and Hippolytus. Once again, however, Aland's conclusion must be called into question. There are certainly other inferences that could be drawn from the inscription data. The boy could have had pagan parents who came to Christ and were baptized at the same time as their son, or immediately after their boy's baptism and martyrdom at the age of 12. Another possibility is that the boy's parents were not Christians but were sympathetic to the Christians and to the wishes of his godparents in composing the burial inscription. By attempting to overthrow the explicit testimony of Cyprian and Hippolytus, not to mention that of Origen, in deference to a hypothesis that is at best questionable, Aland undermined his own credibility as an historian.

Gregory of Nazianzus, named the "Theologian" for his efforts in turning Constantinople to the Nicene faith, was made bishop of that city in A.D. 381. That same year he advised that children should normally be baptized at the age of three, while he insisted that baptism not be delayed till that point if the child's health were endangered. Jeremias stated that Gregory's recommendation had little bearing on the prevailing practice in the ancient church, and was reflective of a certain critical period of baptismal postponement during the 4th century, and within a limited geographical area. Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition* remained the prevailing practice in the church as a whole receiving codification in the western and eastern branches of the church (Walker [1918] 1952, 126; Jeremias 1962, 91-92, 96).

John Chrysostom, renowned for his "simple grammatical understanding of the Scriptures," is regarded as the greatest preacher ever to grace the Eastern church (Walker [1918] 1952, 141). H. S. Boyd noted that, about A.D. 403, Empress Eudoxia reminded Chrysostom that he had baptized her children: "I remember, that by thy hands MY INFANTS or LITTLE CHILDREN [Greek=paidia] WERE BAPTIZED." Boyd commented,

It is well known that the venerable Prelate of Constantinople was a rigid disciplinarian, and was strictly attached to the forms and usages, as well as to the doctrine of the Church. It is equally notorious, that he never said any thing, or did any thing, to ingratiate himself with the Royal Family, but that, in his official character, he lashed their vices, unceasingly and unsparingly. He opposed Eudoxia in particular; and this opposition at length cost his life. It is, therefore certain that he would never have consented to baptize the children of the Empress, if Infant Baptism had not been generally administered in his day....At the period when this conversation took place, the young Prince Theodosius was only two years old. His excellent sister Pulcharia was four years old (1823, 6:343).

Augustine wrote, "All Antiquity hath firmly held that Believers' Infants do receive Remission of Original sin by Christian Baptism" [August. de peccat. Merit. & Remis. 1.3.c.5.] (Baxter 1651, A-3). In another work Augustine stated,

If any man ask for Divine Authority in this matter, although we most rightly believe, that what the Universal Church holdeth, and was not instituted by Councils, but hath been ever held, was not delivered but by Apostical Authority; yet may we truly conjecture that the Sacrament of Baptism pertaineth to Infants, by Circumcision which the former people did receive [August. *de Bapt. cont. donatist.* 1.4.c.23] (Baxter 1651, A-3).

Augustine's appeal to "Circumcision," as a sufficient basis in itself for infant baptism, may provide a clue concerning Origen's statement that "the church received a tradition from the apostles to give baptism to infants" (a tradition to which Augustine likewise alludes). It may also provide the key to Aland's historical method. It is quite conceivable that the apostle Paul's explicit connecting of circumcision and baptism in

Colossians 2:11-12 represented the rudimentary expression of the "tradition from the Apostles." If this was indeed the case, then Aland clearly rejected the "tradition." For in reference to Colossians 2:11, Aland commented, ". . . children are clearly not in view in this passage, still less infants; they fall completely outside the writer's field of vision" (1963, 84). And this he did in the face of Paul's words specifically addressed to children in the same letter to the Colossians (3:20).

Having rejected the rudimentary expression of the "tradition from the Apostles," Aland then had to ignore it in Justin Martyr's work, regard it as a novelty in Cyprian, and interpret the claim concerning it in Origen and Hippolytus as a deliberate fabrication.

For Aland, however, the question of the propriety of baptizing infants did not hinge on its inception at the time of the apostles or their immediate successors. Aland simply reasoned that infant baptism could not have taken hold in the early church until the doctrine of original sin was fully developed.

. . . belief in the sinlessness of infants was held continuously till the time of Tertullian. . . So long as and wherever this assumption held good, infant baptism was plainly not necessary, indeed it was superfluous, the more so while the eschatological expectation of the nearness of the End persisted, and it certainly did continue right into the heart of the second century (1963, 106).

Aland's linking the rise of infant baptism to the decline in the eschatological expectation did not carry any weight with Jeremias. Jeremias insisted that baptism was an eschatological sacrament, and on that basis argued infant baptism from Acts 2:39 (1962, 23). Aland's linking of infant baptism with the doctrine of original sin, however, did have theological merit, as the Pelagian controversy revealed (Bridge & Phipps 1977, 38). Furthermore, Aland's pinpointing the inception of the doctrine of original sin to "the time of Tertullian" agreed with the conclusion of Louis Berkov who stated that "the first trace of the doctrine of

original sin" was found in the writings of Tertullian (1937, 67-68). To concede this much to Aland, however, is not to acknowledge his conclusions, unless it could be demonstrated that the inception of infant baptism as the normative practice for the church required the full-blown doctrine of original sin.

It is one thing to say that the theological basis for infant baptism was not fully in place prior to the late second-century development of the doctrine of original sin. It is quite another thing to reject explicit historical testimony to the first-century inception of infant baptism on the ground that its theological basis had not been fully developed in the church's thinking at the time of its purported inception. If a theological rationale was required, sufficient to account for its first-century inception, the rudimentary expression of the apostolic "tradition" contained in Colossians 2:11-12 would have qualified as the ground of the practice. That Paul's theological connection between circumcision and baptism had an early formative impact upon the church's thinking appeared from Justin Martyr's mention of it his *Dialogue with Trypho* in the mid-second century. The problem was that Aland did not see any connection between Colossians 2:11-12 and the issue of infant baptism. Consequently, he discarded the explicit historical testimony of the church fathers in deference to what he could accept as a sufficient theological rationale, namely the doctrine of original sin.

What Aland also overlooked was that the doctrine of original sin was implied in Colossians 2:11-12, and hence in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* which exhorted men to "be circumcised with the true circumcision" putting away "your iniquity from your souls" since "God bids you be washed in this laver." (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 1:203). Inasmuch as the rite of circumcision was applicable to the infant males, clearly infants had been infected with the same "iniquity." And while neither original sin nor infant baptism was *explicit* in Justin's writings, as they were later in Origen's works, both were clearly *implied* by such a statement. Justin's statement lends credence to Augustine's claim that "all Antiquity hath firmly held that Believers Infants do receive Remission of Original sin by

Christian Baptism." Jeremias found further confirmation of the same claim in the early second-century *Apology* of Aristides however Aland disputed it (Aland 1963, 55).

Those who oppose infant baptism are hard-pressed to find any clear examples from church history prior to the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement in which infant baptism was repudiated by a church leader or an organized group of Christian believers.

It has been alleged that the Waldensians in northern Italy, (who met with the Roman Church's disapproval beginning in the 12th century, and who later settled in Provence, France) rejected infant baptism. At least, this was one of the charges brought against the group by the Roman Church. William Wall and later, Thomas Gallagher, exposed the scandalous nature of the charges. Gallagher cited the Waldensians' own testimony in Dr. G. S. Faber's *History of the Waldensians* as part of their confession delivered to the French king in 1541:

We believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, having abolished circumcision, instituted baptism, by which we are received into the Church of the people of God. This outward baptism exhibits to us another inward baptism; namely, the grace of God which cannot be seen with the eyes. The apostles and other ministers of the Church baptize (the Word of God being adduced as authority for the sacrament), and give only the visible sign; but the Lord Jesus Christ, the chief Shepherd, alone gives the increase, and causes us to receive the things signified. They greatly err, who deny baptism to the children of Christians (Gallagher 1878, 173).

Bridges and Phypers tried to make a case that the Paulician sect originating in eastern Europe in the sixth century represented an early Baptist movement notwithstanding the sect's Adoptionist view of Christ (1977, 91-93). To institute baptism-at-the-age-of-thirty on the basis of Adoptionist Christology certainly constituted heretical practice (Latourette

1953, 299). If the Paulicians are to be considered harbingers of sixteenth-century Anabaptism in Switzerland, they hardly commend Anabaptism, however commendable may have been their opposition to the Roman church's hierarchy with its sacerdotalism, images, and relics (Walker [1918] 1952, 235). It would have been one thing to baptize on the exclusive basis of adult confession of faith in Christ, but quite another to baptize on the heretical basis that Jesus only *became* the Son of God at his baptism as an adult. But then again, could it be that the failure to grasp the implications of Christ's passing through infancy is the root of the adults-only baptism formula in any case?

But Adoptionism was not the full extent of the difficulties attending the Paulicians. Church historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette, described other problems as well:

Like the Marcionites, they were dualists, holding that matter, including this world and the flesh, is the creation of an evil power, the imperfect God of the Old Testament, while spirit and souls are the creation of the good God. The "perfect" among them abstained from sexual intercourse and from some kinds of meats. . . . Christ was regarded as born of the good God, but as passing through his mother's body like water through a pipe and deriving nothing from her flesh. To them both his birth and death were unreal, and his work was that of a teacher (1953, 299).

If it is true that their ancient manual of doctrine, translated into English in 1898, revealed the Paulicians to be "Ancient Oriental Baptists . . . in many respects Protestants before Protestantism," as Robinson's *Baptist Principles* claimed, one has to wonder in what respects they were "Protestants before Protestantism" (Bridge & Phipers 1977, 91-92). Neither Latourette nor Congregationalist church historian Williston Walker mentioned it ([1918] 1952, 235).

Paul King Jewett, former Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, sought to discredit

early Christian testimony concerning infant baptism. His approach, like Aland's, must be considered *anti-historical*. Jewett clearly recognized the implications of that testimony were it allowed to stand unchallenged:

To admit that infant baptism has been practiced *ever since* the apostles lived, while insisting that it was not *while* they lived, is a highly implausible hypothesis, to say the least (1978,16).

Another prominent twentieth-century Baptist scholar, George Raymond Beasley-Murray, in his *Baptism in the New Testament*, raised the question as to how the rise and universal adoption of infant baptism could be accounted for if it had not been introduced by the leaders of the early church. He then made a rather striking acknowledgment: "A definitive answer cannot be given to the question, or it would have been supplied long ago!" (1963, 352). Little wonder that he encouraged Kurt Aland to attempt such a task! Unfortunately Aland did not allow the historical record to speak for itself, but sought to discredit it on the basis of theological presuppositions. If one simply allows the historical record to speak for itself without imposing his own theological presuppositions, he can only come to one conclusion: The church practiced infant baptism from the earliest days.

Did the church's baptism of infants represent a early departure from the "faith once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), or was it a legitimate expression of that faith? If "history is the friend of infant baptism," is the Bible also its friend (Christensen 1973, 11)? These are the critical questions, and they will be examined in the chapters that follow.

The Ancient Landmark

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