II

INITIATION ANCIENT AND EASTERN

IT IS CERTAIN that the baptism of infants was practised in North Africa in Tertullian's time, and in Caesarea when Origen was in that city.[1] There is therefore no reason to discount the evidence of the *Apostolic Tradition*[2] when it records that children not of an age to answer for themselves were intitiated along with adults in a single rite in Rome at the beginning of the third century; even though Hippolytus's work may well have undergone considerably later revision before finding its way into any of the versions and adaptations, whether Latin or Oriental, now extant. Variations in practice are attested for different geographical areas,[3] but there are so many supporting witnesses[4] for so much of the rite of the *Apostolic Tradition* that an account of that rite will give a fair indication of the practice of the Church in the formative period of the third and fourth centuries.[5]

Tertullian states that Easter was the pre-eminent time for baptism, and it seems certain that the rite described in the *Apostolic Tradition* was celebrated during Easter night. Baptism was preceded by a long period of preparation. On being brought forward by sponsors those who sought entry into the Church were examined concerning their reasons for coming and their readiness to abandon evil ways and forbidden occupations. If found worthy, they were admitted to a catechumenate which, at least in Hippolytus's day, usually lasted three years. During this time they received instruction in classes which concluded with prayer and with a laying on of hands by the teacher. When they were "chosen"[6] to receive baptism, their sponsors had to testify that they had lived piously while catechumens. Then throughout their proximate preparation for baptism they were exorcized daily.[7] On the Thursday before baptism the candidates washed themselves; on the next two days they fasted. On the Saturday they received the final exorcism from the bishop, who also "breathed on their faces and sealed their foreheads and ears and noses". In the paschal vigil the candidates heard the Scriptures read and received instruction.

Baptism took place away from the full assembly, and in the follow-

ing manner. At cock-crow prayer was said over the water. Having stripped, each candidate professed his renunciation of Satan and was anointed with the oil of exorcism (exorcized by the bishop), the administering presbyter saying, "Let all evil spirits depart from thee." Then the candidate went down into the water. He replied, "I believe", to each of three credal questions concerning the Trinity and was "baptized" by the minister (whether bishop or presbyter or deacon) upon each answer. On leaving the water the candidate was anointed by a presbyter with the oil of thanksgiving (previously consecrated by the bishop), the accompanying words being "I anoint thee with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ". The newly-baptized dressed themselves and entered the full assembly. There the bishop laid hand upon them[8] and prayed.[9] Next he anointed the head of each one by hand, saying, "I anoint thee with holy oil in God the Father Almighty and Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit." Then the bishop "sealed"[10] him on the forehead and gave him the kiss of peace.

Thereupon the neophytes enjoyed their new privileges as members of the Church: they joined in the prayers of the faithful, they shared the congregational kiss of peace, and they participated in the eucharistic liturgy proper. At their first communion the neophytes not only received the bread and wine but also partook of a cup of water and a cup of milk and honey.[11] The water is said to be an inward washing corresponding to the outward baptism, and the milk and honey is referred to the promise made to the Patriarchs concerning the promised land.

The only[12] churches whose usual practice is still to administer this total pattern of baptism, "confirmation" and first communion on the one occasion are churches in which, for reasons that will appear later, the infant initiation of children of Christian parents is the heavily preponderant practice and the initiation of an adult convert from outside the Christian sphere is a rarity.

Here are two or three examples of rites which were first fashioned for adults and which are now usually employed for infants:

1. The Byzantine rite begins with "prayers for a catechumen". After silent insufflations and consignations, the priest lays hand upon the person's head and says a prayer which appears to be for the making of a catechumen; then the Devil is summoned to come out and God is prayed to expel all evil spirits from the candidate and to make him a worthy member of the Church and an heir to the Kingdom. Thereupon the priest turns the candidate westwards and asks three times,

"Dost thou renounce Satan . . . ?" Each time the catechumen, or his sponsor (*Ἀνάδοχος*), replies "I renounce". The priest asks thrice, "Hast thou renounced Satan?" and thrice the catechumen or his sponsor replies, "I have renounced". Next, the priest orders him to exhale and to spit on Satan. Having turned the candidate eastwards, the priest asks thrice, "Dost thou join thyself to Christ?" and "Hast thou joined thyself to Christ?"; the catechumen or sponsor answers appropriately and adds that he believes in Him as King and God. The candidate or sponsor recites the Nicene Creed and, having thrice more replied that he has adhered to Christ, bows down before the Trinity.

At the beginning of baptism the priest censes the font. A diaconal litany of intercession covers an *apologia sacerdotis* said quietly. Then the priest prays aloud to the Father for the sanctification of the water by the Holy Spirit, continuing, "And give it the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan. Make it the fountain of incorruption, the gift of holiness, the remission of sins . . ."; the priest signs the water thrice with the cross, breathing on it, and says thrice, "Let all adverse powers be crushed beneath the sign of Thy precious Cross . . .". After this prayer for the consecration of the water, the priest breathes thrice upon olive oil which the deacon brings to him, signs it thrice with the cross, and prays for God's blessing upon it. While a threefold Alleluia is sung, the priest then pours oil into the water crosswise. Next, the priest makes a cruciform anointing on the baptizand's forehead, breast, shoulders, ears, feet and hands, beginning with the words, "The servant of God, N., is anointed with the oil of gladness, in the name (of the Trinity)." Facing the east and holding the candidate upright, the priest then immerses him three times in the water, saying, "The servant of God, N., is baptized in the name (of the Trinity)". Thereupon Psalm 32 is sung, and the priest dresses the newly-baptized in the white garment, saying, "The servant of God, N., is clothed with the tunic of righteousness, in the name (of the Trinity)".

The priest says a prayer preparatory to chrismation. Chrismation takes place with the holy *myron*, a perfumed oil consecrated by the patriarch. The priest anoints the baptized with *myron* crosswise on the various parts of the body beginning with the forehead, saying, "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen." Then the priest, the sponsor and the baptized process round the font while "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ: Alleluia" is sung.

The concluding reading of the Apostle (Rom. 6: 3–11) and Gospel (Matt. 28: 16–20) betrays the fact that the eucharistic liturgy used to be

taken up at this point. Nowadays, however, the neophyte's first communion is delayed until the following Sunday, unless he communicates at once from wine kept from a celebration of the liturgy before the baptism.

Two ceremonies which were formerly carried out a week after baptism are now attached directly to the baptismal service. The first is ablution: water is sprinkled on the baptismal dress, and the neophyte himself is sprinkled with water and washed with a sponge; at this removal of the material traces of his initiation, the candidate is assured that its spiritual effects are lasting, "Thou wast baptized, thou wast illumined, etc." The second ceremony is peculiar to the Byzantine rite: the cruciform cutting of the neophyte's hair by the priest; this is a sign that the baptized person is dedicated to God's glory.

2. The Coptic and Ethiopic rites[13] resemble one another very closely in structure and even in wording. The ceremonies of the catechumenate include the asking of the candidate's name and an anointing with plain oil ("May this oil bring to nought all the attacks of the adversary"). The ceremonies belonging more immediately before baptism proper comprise an imposition of hand, with prayer for deliverance from Satan, the candidate's renunciation of Satan,[14] an exorcistic insufflation (in the Coptic), his adhesion to Christ,[14] his profession of faith according to a brief Trinitarian formula,[14] and prayer for his strengthening. Then comes an anointing of the whole body in the oil of gladness (previously consecrated by the patriarch) followed by more prayers for the candidate (with imposition of hand in the Coptic). At this point in the Coptic rite plain oil is poured into the water.

Both rites continue with the Apostle (Titus 2: 11–3: 7), the Catholicon (1 John 5: 5–13), the Praxis (Acts 8: 26–39), the Psalm (Psalm 32: 1f.), the Gospel (John 3: 1–21) and the intercessions, as in the eucharistic rite. Then there are prayers for the baptizand and an *apologia sacerdotis*; three solemn prayers (for peace, the patriarch, and the congregation) and the recitation of the creed follow, again as in the eucharistic liturgy. Oil is poured into the water (plain oil in the Ethiopic, the oil of gladness in the Coptic). Next comes the great prayer for the blessing of the water, accompanied by insufflations and consignations and followed by the pouring of chrism (previously consecrated by the patriarch) into the water while Alleluia is sung.

Baptism is by trine immersion, with the active formula. There is a prayer for the deconsecration of the water. The forehead, and then the whole body, is anointed with chrism (". . . an unction of the grace of the Holy Spirit . . ."); and then there is an imposition of hand with

prayer ("... Receive the Holy Spirit ..."; the Coptic has an insufflation at this point). In both rites the neophyte is then dressed in white, crowned and girdled. He communicates in wine and (in the Ethiopic only) receives milk and honey. Communion is followed by a prayer with imposition of hand, a benediction, and a hymn. The Copts take the neophyte in procession round the church while the hymn is sung.[15]

It is not easy to find a modern theological statement explaining how such a rite of total initiation, clearly composed with responsible subjects in mind, may properly be administered to infants. For the practice of giving total initiation to infants is confined to the Eastern Churches;[16] and these are churches which simply *do* things, without feeling the need of a neat rationale for them. On asking the question "Do all Christian parents have their infants baptized?" one is apt to receive the simple, possibly *simpliste*, reply, "Of course; otherwise the infants would not be Christians." The more analytical theologians of the West find themselves accused of leading into heresy through asking too many questions. Nevertheless we cannot renounce our Western birthright; and so theologize we must.

The churches which practise the complete initiation of infants are living in one of two historical situations: either they are found in countries where church and society are considered practically coterminous; or else they exist as well-defined, closely knit communities in a hostile or indifferent environment.

The Orthodox Churches in Greece and Ethiopia are the best remaining examples of the first type. The Orthodox Greek is both a churchman and a citizen, and in that order: the Greek father takes with him the ecclesiastical certificate of baptism when he visits the village mayor or the town hall for the civil registration of his child's birth. In Ethiopia, Christianity is the imperial religion, and whole tracts of the country are solidly Christian.

There are more instances of churches in the second type of situation. In India, the Jacobites are surrounded by Hindus and Buddhists; in Egypt, the Coptic Christians live in the midst of Islam. The Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe live in communist countries whose governments and populaces show them varying degrees of hostility or indifference. The Orthodox Churches in Western Europe and North America are set within a pluralistic society tolerant of those of any religion and those of none; these churches are almost entirely composed of *émigrés* who have remained close together in their national socio-religious communities.

It is in these two types of situation that the administration of total Christian initiation to infants can, in fact, find its best rationale. In Greece, for instance, Christianity has been so much a part of the national life that the child has accompanied his parents in their more or less regular attendance at worship and has thereby learnt his faith gradually in the school of the liturgy. The Greek child receives, in addition, two hours of Christian teaching each week at day school. So he has stayed throughout his life in the church into which he was initiated as an infant. In countries in which the Orthodox Church is, for whatever reasons, sharply distinguished from its environment, its members have from the beginning of their lives been steeped in the worship and communal life which are its distinguishing features, and they have continued as the Orthodox Christians they were baptized. When, as in these circumstances, it is self-evident that a person will live his whole life as a Christian, then there is a case to be made for his total initiation at the very beginning.

There is no doubt, however, that the advance of a technological civilization is sweeping away the social patterns with which the life of these churches has been closely associated. Industry draws the Indian Jacobite from his village home into urban areas, and he finds himself alone and severed from the communal life of his church. The young Russian Orthodox is subjected to the pressures, whether crude or subtle, of atheism by the state; and the second and third generations of Orthodox immigrants in the U.S.A. take an increasing part in a more uniform American way of life, so that the Christian influence of the separated communities to which their fathers kept grows less and less, and they may drift from the faith altogether. The Greek in Athens and the Cypriot shop-owner in Liverpool alike find that affluence tends to reduce their participation in Christian worship.

Some churches are still barely affected by this movement, but it is clear that most of the Eastern Churches are beginning to have to face the same social factors that have confronted the Western Churches from the start of the modern industrial era. It will be interesting to see whether the different ethos of these churches leads them to tackle the problems on other lines than those tried by the Western Churches. One of the questions which they must bring themselves to ask, so it seems to me as a Western Protestant, is this: Is it right to continue the initiation of infants when it grows more and more uncertain whether they will stay in the Church?

Even where the circumstances are most favourable to the growth of

the child in the Christian faith, the practice of administering total initiation to infants still raises all at once the various theological issues which bother many Protestants concerning the suitability of children as sacramental subjects. One such issue is the relation between baptism and the remission of sins. Baptism is "unto remission of sins" (Acts 2: 38): how does this apply to infants?

Many scholars consider that the notion of infants as embroiled in "original sin" played some part in the consolidation of the practice of infant baptism at least, if not in its origin. On the ground, however, that the Augustinian version of the doctrine of original sin, being unpalatable to "modern man", is false, G. R. Beasley-Murray[17] holds that baptism administered to infants cannot be true baptism because it cannot be unto remission of sins, there being nothing to remit.

But even if some theologians (with Beasley-Murray and against Augustine) are no longer willing to apply the strict language of sin and guilt before an age of "individual responsibility", the Christian view that a person shares from the beginning of his life in a fallen human nature which is turned in upon itself holds good—and indeed has received support from the psychological insights of "modern man" into the egocentricity of the infant. May not, therefore, the baptism of an infant be seen, even where there is a refusal to attach the categories of sin and guilt to the infant's solidarity with the human race "in Adam", as the proleptic remission, for Christ's sake, of the actual and culpable sins which the person will commit when at an age of responsibility he deliberately makes Adam's sin his own (as he certainly will)?

A more general and more important issue is that of the relation between the bestowal, not of forgiveness alone, but of any other benefit at all and the faith of the recipient of a sacrament. The baptismal rites outlined in this chapter envisage the case in which a responsible person is instructed in the faith, renounces Satan, and professes his allegiance to Christ and his faith in the Trinity—and yet they are administered to infants.

The Eastern Churches do not seem worried by this, nor has the Roman seemed to be by a similar state of affairs in its own rite of infant baptism;[18] but many Protestants in churches which practise infant baptism consider that the Baptist position has merit at least in so far as it springs from the desire to avoid a mechanical or magical view of the sacrament, and that they themselves must therefore demonstrate some connection between the baptism of infants and faith.

Recent Protestant apologetic for infant baptism has stressed the presence of faith in the baptizing Church and in the parents or other sponsors of the infant baptized. It is certainly true that every baptism is the occasion of the Church's witnessing to its faith; and the infant is certainly favoured who is born to faithful parents and committed to people who hold themselves bound to provide for his upbringing in the faith. Valuable though these ideas are, I would nevertheless maintain, at the risk of calling forth a disparaging reference to Renaissance individualism,[19] that the faith which finally matters in relation to baptism is the faith of the very person baptized. There are three possible ways of seeing the relation between baptism and personal faith in the case of those baptized as infants:

1. That the infant already has faith before baptism. This is the logical implication of the Eastern and Roman rites (and of Luther's *Taufbüchlein*) in which the questions are directly addressed to the infant and the sponsor replies simply as his mouthpiece, as though the candidate were a responsible person who either was dumb or did not understand the particular language of the rite.[20]

2. That faith is given at and through baptism itself. This is the theological view which prevailed, for example, in Lutheran orthodoxy and which is maintained in the Roman Catholic Church. (Both 1 and 2 have difficulty in withstanding the two tests which are normally applied to facts of faith: Few modern exegetes would accept Luther's view[21] that the leaping of the unborn John in Elizabeth's womb at Mary's Visitation (Luke 1: 41) was *biblical* proof that any infant might be expected to respond in faith when confronted by the Word of God; and (from the standpoint of *the Church's experience*) alongside those baptized in infancy who later come to profess their faith there must be set both those who, though baptized, never come to this profession and also those previously unbaptized who come to faith.)

3. That infants are baptized with a view to their future faith. Among the earlier rites there is an isolated case of this in the Bobbio Missal (*circa* A.D. 700) in which the sponsor replies "May he renounce" and "May he believe".[22] There is at least a hint at the idea in the address to the godparents in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England, even though the godparents are called upon to speak meanwhile in the name of the child.[23] The rite proposed by the Church of England's Liturgical Commission in 1958 retained the "I believe" spoken by the sponsors in the name of the child (to whom the interrogations are addressed). But many other modern Protestant services[24] ask the

parents or sponsors rather for a promise to provide such an upbringing for the infant that he may come to profess his own faith.

In churches where this is the use there is also a service, sometimes called confirmation, for the public profession of faith in later years, and this can be looked upon as the solemn occasion on which the person baptized as an infant completes on his part[25] the act which on God's part was completed in principle at the moment of baptism.[26] And, even in churches where it is held that sacramental grace is bestowed in it, confirmation may be understood as being, when administered at a later age to those baptized as infants, at least in part a solemn profession of faith.[27]

Those confirmed in infancy do not have this solemn single moment for the profession of their faith; but in the Eastern Churches the Blessing of the Waters at Epiphany as a memorial of Christ's Baptism affords an annual memorial of every baptism,[28] and all Roman Catholics have the opportunity to renew their baptismal vows at the paschal vigil every year. For all churches, moreover, the eucharistic liturgy offers a regular occasion for the profession of faith.

The question of *infants* and communion, however, is yet another theological issue raised by the administration of the total pattern of initiation to infants. Protestant churches which baptize infants, and often their theologians who are the most ardent defenders of this practice, nevertheless balk the giving of communion to infants; nor is infant communion common in the Roman Church. To the charge of inconsistency, often levelled by Baptists and their sympathizers against those who give baptism and deny communion to infants, Cullmann replies[29] by asserting that the eucharist is for those who already believe "to the exclusion of . . . the not-yet-believing", but he does not in fact make clear *why* those who have, on his own argument, been accepted, by God's gracious act in the baptism given to them as infants before they have faith, into the Body of Christ should not then just as well participate in the continuing life of the Church in the eucharist before they come to faith.[30] An American Lutheran,[31] on the other hand, has argued that the gospel of free grace calls for communion as well as baptism to be given to infants.

In fact, however, the whole of the Western Church inherits the Western medieval refusal of communion to infants; the process by which first communion became separated from baptism and confirmation will be narrated in the next chapter as part of the broader story of the disintegration of the initiation complex.