

# The Baptist System UnScriptural and UnReformed

## Part Four

### THE ORIGINS, DEVELOPMENT AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE MODERN BAPTIST MOVEMENT

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* John Calvin wrote these salient words:

"....it is evident that the term *baptise* means to immerse, and that this was the form used by the primitive church."<sup>66</sup>

Such a statement is of course, a golden gift for a Baptist polemicist, and is only one of a number of statements made by Reformers that add grist to the Immersionist mills.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, many baptists assert that the Reformation was initially "immersionistic" in principle, and that later political exigencies drove the Reformers off course, leaving the Anabaptists isolated and persecuted by the Establishmentarian "police state" Protestantism of the early Reformers.<sup>68</sup> And whilst modern Baptist

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<sup>66</sup> Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Book IV ch. XV end of para. 19.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. the references in **Hughes Oliphant Old**, *The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century*, pages 273 ff. where he cites Luther's *Taufbüchlein*, Leo Jud's editions of the Baptismal rite of Zurich, and Zwingli as early advocates of immersionism.

<sup>68</sup> On the oppressive horrors of this "police state" note should be taken of **Leonard Verduin's** tome of the 1960's *The Reformers and their Stepchildren*. Verduin casts the Reformers in a very bad light and eulogises the Anabaptists as heroes in a somewhat biased manner, in our view. But nevertheless his research on ancient 17th cent. records cannot be dismissed overall.....the Reformers, in particular those of the Lutheran and Zwinglian Reformed stream, practiced cruelty towards dissidents. Verduin does not have so much to say against Calvin as against the other Reformers, though he notes several instances with the words: "one could have wished Calvin had not said that....." With respect to the Genevan Reformation, the recent translation and publication of Vol 1 of the *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva in the Time of Calvin, vol. 1 1542-- 1544* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 2000) delivers the Consistory minutes for the Genevan Reformed Church for those years, and is somewhat revelatory. The minutes record what amounts to "police state repression" of all dissidents, as the State Government of Geneva was ....

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writers evince variant attitudes vis a vis the 16th cent. Anabaptists, they all unite in their condemnation of the Reformed and Lutheran attitudes to those sects, and in their appreciation of Anabaptist aims and objectives with respect to both the sacrament of Baptism, and the "gathered church" ideal, as opposed to the Reformers' "establishment territorial church" schemes. <sup>69</sup>

It is difficult to isolate the development of the Baptismal controversy through the Reformation period from the surrounding political considerations that weighed heavily on the early Reformers. The medieval Roman church was not just a church, it was a political empire, the tentacles of which extended into all Western Christendom. In every Western nation, the Roman church was the only religion granted legitimacy. And all citizens were required to belong to that church, and attend upon its requisite cultus and rituals. Failure to do so brought the pressures of inquisition, and the imposition of intolerable sanctions. Hence the churches encompassed not only a minute number of devout believers in their membership, but also extensive multitudes of superstitious and frightened infidels, baptized as babies into the all-embracing State system.

As the Reformation sprang up, the total Roman stranglehold was broken in many of the German mini-states, in Britain, and the Netherlands, Hungary, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and to a great degree, in France. To consolidate their position, the Reformers worked closely with the Political powers in those states, and the Reformation meant ....precisely that, instead of the Roman church being the established Territorial State Church in those countries, the Protestant Church took its place. Hence instead of all citizens being baptized as babes into Romanism, they were now baptized into Protestantism. <sup>70</sup>

This soon meant, of course, that the vast number of hitherto superstitious quasi-pagans who had previously populated the Roman churches in those areas were forcibly made into Protestants. Pagan behaviour and indiscipline characterised

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involved with Ecclesiastical discipline. Offenders in spiritual matters were sent off by the Consistory to the civil government for punishment, which often consisted of a term in prison on a diet of bread and water. Where, one asks, can one find justification for such practice anywhere in the pages or the spirit of the New Testament? This all said, one must recognise that Calvin et al fought their battles on difficult ground, we go astray, I believe, when we regard their position and polity as being a permanent mandate for the church, and a justification of their practice per se.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. for instance, the article BAPTISM (Baptist View) given in **Schaff Herzog**.

<sup>70</sup> This is exemplified for example in the notion, entertained strongly by **Knox** and his associates in Scotland, that Scotland as a NATION was chosen of God to be His people. And **Rutherford**, in his **LEX REX** betrays the tendency strongly, in that he tends in his exposition to slide from Israel to Scotland and back to Israel again, blurring the actual distinctions betwixt the two. As such all Scots would have to be considered as God's people, and indiscriminate paedobaptism would be the instrument of initiation. Similar principles ruled the day in England.

these new Protestant "converts", and in reaction to this serious idiosyncrasy, new sects of fervent believers arose within the Protestant nations who pointed to indiscriminate infant baptism as the fly in the Protestant ointment. These sects wanted new churches to consist only of "professing true believers", or that their churches would be, as they called them, "gathered churches." Baptism, they asserted, should only be administered to those who give credible profession of their faith, and not to the unholy phalanx of offspring from every Tom, Dick, and Harry under the State banner. And for these people, a "credible profession of faith" was necessarily coupled with a holy walk in life. Reacting against the travesty of indiscriminate infant baptism as practised by Establishment churches they quite naturally reacted against infant baptism *per se*,<sup>71</sup> as for them, they saw such baptism as bringing into the church young tribes of unbelievers.<sup>72</sup>

These sects were denominated as "Anabaptists", the title depicting the insistence of such sects that :

(i) Infant baptism was invalid and unScriptural.

(ii) In order to receive a valid baptism, those who had already been baptised as infants ought now to be rebaptized as adults. Hence the title "anabaptists" which means, those who have been baptized again.

Whilst the theology of these sects varied across an enormous spectrum that stretched from the sublime to the ridiculous and on to the downright dangerous,<sup>73</sup> it has to be admitted that amongst them were many sincere and godly people deeply concerned that under the Establishmentarian scheme the Protestant reformation was all too often little better than the Romanism it was replacing.<sup>74</sup> The fact is that an emphasis on personal holiness found amongst many Anabaptists was all too often lacking in the State Reformed Churches. The policy of indiscriminate infant baptism virtually ensured this state of affairs, and was a constant downdrag on the work of the Reformers.

However, the rise of such Anabaptist sects was effectually putting banana peel

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<sup>71</sup> It is important to make this distinction. Paedobaptism is a biblical doctrine which stands apart from Establishmentarian principles. Whilst Establishmentarianism effectively demands infant baptism in order to function, infant baptism in and of itself does not require Establishmentarianism in order to justify its existence or to function successfully. A plethora of examples of well-functioning Paedo-baptistic churches that are not "Established Territorial Churches" is evident world-wide.

<sup>72</sup> That this was the major platform in the Anabaptist case against Establishmentarianism is documented by **Old**, *Op. cit.* and pages 77 onwards. Cf. also **Bridge and Phypers**, *The Water that Divides*, especially the chapter: "Reformation Tragedy" pages 95ff.

<sup>73</sup> We have already noted above (**BRJ No.29** and pages 6-7 and footnote 14) how it is difficult to theologically categorise the various Anabaptist sects.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. **Bridge and Phypers**, *Op.cit.*, page 94...."adult baptism came to represent salvation by faith, protest against corrupt Christendom, and suffering for the sake of purified religion."

under the feet of the Reformers.<sup>75</sup> If you tolerated the Anabaptists as a deviation from the State Churches, it also allowed the large Romanist rumps in those States to lodge claim for the same tolerance, under the aegis of which they would work surreptitiously for a re-take-over of the nation. And before you knew where you were, church and nation would be crumbling into anarchy before your very eyes. Indeed, anarchy was the outcome in several places, not least at the tragedy at Munster. And mass reversion to Romanism was another possibility which in fact soon became reality in Austria and Belgium, then later in France, and Poland.

Luther and his followers, together with Zwingli and the Swiss Reformed, responded to the Anabaptist challenge with an Inquisition. A Protestant Inquisition. At all costs the Protestant State had to be preserved politically in order for Protestant churches to be preserved ecclesiastically. Anabaptists were taken, jailed, subjected to horrific, blood-curdling tortures, then burned alive or drowned by the thousands.<sup>76</sup> By Protestants. All in the name of Establishmentarian Territorial Church Religion.<sup>77</sup> All in the Name of Jesus!

Persecuted too by the Romanists, these Anabaptistic groups filtered all across Europe, and across the ocean into North America. Far from being blitzed into total oblivion, they amazingly survived to blossom forth in the 17th and 18th centuries as the modern Baptist, Mennonite, and Moravian sects, the first of which now dominates the prevailing outlook in Protestant Evangelicalism as to the doctrine of baptism, and the principle of the "gathered church". Withersoever their influences have had a salient bearing on the nations in which they live, religious tolerance has been the outcome.

In all these events, the Reformers were of course, in an invidious position. They too, wanted discipline and holy living to characterise the churches, every bit as much as the Anabaptists did. But the total situation embroiled them so much in the politics of the individual nations that there seemed no other option. To avoid anarchy on the one hand, and to avoid a recrudescence of Romanism on the other, the

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<sup>75</sup> The close alliance of Church and State involved in Establishmentarianism meant that any dissidence against the doctrine and practice of the Church was *de facto* a dissidence against the State and the Ruler. Refusal to submit to the ecclesiastical authorities was therefore incipient, if not outright rebellion against the State. This fact probably explains the cruel treatment that all dissidents have suffered over the ages at the hands of State and Ecclesiastical powers.

<sup>76</sup> Speaking of those who wished to practice immersionism, **Zwingli**, formerly himself convinced of immersionism, could utter these terrible words: "let him who talks about going under the water, GO UNDER..." Cited in **Bridge and Phypers** Op. cit.p.95. This statement accompanied the mass destruction of Anabaptists in Zurich by means of drowning.

<sup>77</sup> In dealing with the Anabaptist leader Felix Manz in Zurich, the Clerk of Courts recorded these words, "They (the Anabaptists) do not allow Infant Baptism. In this way they will put an end to secular authority." Cf. **Bridge and Phypers** *ibid.* page 95. The message is clear, dissidence to the doctrine of the State Church was viewed as Political Insurrection.

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Sword of the State had to be invoked. It seems in retrospect, indeed, that whenever religionists make a heavy investment in State politics, inevitably before long the Bible in their one hand has to be supplemented by a gun in the other. All, of course, in the Name of Jesus.

It has to be said that the Anabaptists in their emphasis on the "gathered church" principle were closer to Scripture than the Magisterial Reformers.<sup>78</sup> And, as if in testimony to this, it is a plain and indisputable fact of history that in all Protestant countries, by the late 16th cent. the Protestant State Churches were seething morasses of indiscipline, unholy living, and political intrigue.<sup>79</sup> Hence the cause of the rise of Puritanism in Britain, the 17th cent. "nadere Reformatie" in Holland,<sup>80</sup> and the rise of "Pietism" in Lutheran Germany<sup>81</sup> and the Nordic lands. This is not to endorse all the theology of such movements, but it is a note that one should understand the circumstances surrounding their development, those circumstances being factors of apostasy in the Reformed, State, Territorial churches. And such apostasy was the result, as the Anabaptists rightly stated, of indiscriminate infant baptism as the principle of those ecclesiastical systems.

However, such considerations should not blind us to the fact that the Anabaptists themselves nurtured a host of idiosyncratic ideas, in particular here we think with respect to the doctrine of Baptism. They had, however, in all this, a theological pretext as well as a practical, ecclesiastical one. Various reformers, like Calvin, in the

<sup>78</sup> Claims are made today by various ardent pro-Establishmentarian groups that the Gospels mandate the enforcement of Christianity by the State, on the basis of texts like Matt. 28: 19 "teach all nations, baptizing them (that is the *nations*, or so such interpreters allege) in the Name....etc." Such an interpretation is a forcing of the language of the text to make it yield a logically unnecessary conclusion, and one which is disparate with the rest of the New Testament.

<sup>79</sup> Only someone totally ignorant of the history of Protestantism in the 16th and 17th centuries would question this assertion.

<sup>80</sup> On the Dutch "second Reformation" or "nadere Reformatie", see the excellent account given by **Dr. Joel R. Beeke** in Vol 1 of *The Christian's Reasonable Service* pages lxxxv onwards, this being part of the introductory articles to the English translation of the Dutchman **Wilhemus A Brakel's Redelijke Godsdiens** first published in Dutch in the year 1700. Note should be taken especially of Beeke's quote on page xciii from **P.B. Van der Watt**, which states, "The Second Reformation revolted against the *unspiritual* state of the nation, ministers, and congregations....." Need one say any more?

<sup>81</sup> On the rise of Pietism see **Mosheim's Institutes of Ecclesiastical History** Book IV, Century XVII, Sect. II, part II, chapter 1, and section 26 ff. Note should be taken of the later evolution of Pietism in the 18th century in the form of the Moravian movement. On this latter cf. **W.R. Ward, The Protestant Evangelical Awakening** (Cambridge Univ. Press 1992). It has to be said that the Protestant State churches seemed impervious to all attempts to improve their internal spirituality, and the 17th cent. Pietists came on the business end of what Mosheim calls "severe laws". As early as the 17th cent. there was what W.R. Ward has described as "poor Protestant morale", (Op. cit . p. 15) and Ward goes on to reveal how the Moravian heirs of the Pietists were still persecuted by "rigid Lutheranism" in the 18th cent. Parallel to all this is the discrimination and persecution imposed on all non-Anglicans in England, Wales, and Ireland. As late as the 20th cent. such oppression has been noted.

statement at the head of this article, were asserting the idea that "immersion" was the original apostolic mode of baptism. And whilst the vast majority of anabaptists did not practice immersionism in the 16th cent., by the first quarter of the 17th century immersionism was evidently on the front end of their ecclesiastical polity.

It is appropriate here to over-view the development of this immersionist dogma.

We have seen that in the centuries after the Edict of Milan (313 AD), the establishment of Christianity as the State Religion of the Roman Empire consolidated, and furthered, the influx of "Mystery Religion" pagan practices into the Church. Immersionism as a baptismal ritual henceforth became more and more the standard theological principle, if not the standard practice, throughout the Roman communion. This development reached its zenith probably in the early part of the second millennium, and thenceforth it seemed to wane, partly due to the material difficulties attendant upon its administration. Immersing the sick, and the aged, and indeed, immersing anybody in the cold winter climates of Europe was not only inconvenient, but hazardous as well. And if aspersion sufficed for such exigencies, why should it not suffice for anyone at any time? If aspersion is a valid baptism for a cripple, is it not also *de facto* a valid baptism for someone not theologically convinced of immersionism, or for a babe? Hence by the late medieval period we find a general relaxing of the immersionist requirement within the churches of the Roman communion. <sup>82</sup>

Come the Renaissance in the 15th century, and the flood of Greek Orthodox manuscripts into the west, and we find the encyclopaedic 10th cent. AD Byzantine Greek lexicon of Suidas carrying great favour amongst scholars, and later on, the Reformers.<sup>83</sup> Reflecting the Eastern Greek Orthodox theological stable from which it emanated, this lexicon was based on Classical Greek, rather than New Testament or Koine Greek, and listed the verb "baptizo" as meaning "to immerse". Naturally enough, the scholarly Reformed orthodox relayed the lexicon's verdict to their own auditors and readers. This explains the statement of Calvin used at the head of this article. In addition, it was the case that the early Reformers, such as Luther, Jud, and Zwingli, obviously influenced by such lexicographical data, began to advocate a revival of immersionism as an attempt to restore apostolic purity of sacramental practice to the Church.<sup>84</sup> Study of the Ancient Church fathers from the 4th cent. AD onwards impelled their zeal in this respect, as from such sources they picked up the first exegetical association between Romans ch. 6 and the mode of baptism, an exegesis which, as we have seen, though new in the 4th cent. AD, became traditional in the centuries that followed. Accordingly, they saw in baptism an enactment of

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. **Hughes Oliphant Old**: Op. cit. pages 265 ff.

<sup>83</sup> **Ibid.** in footnote 70 page 273.

<sup>84</sup> **Ibid** pp. 273 ff.

Christ's own burial and resurrection. Pure immersionist doctrine.

Their attempt to restore immersionism soon waned, and fizzled out. As Hughes Oliphant Old says, if the Reformers were initially misled by the wrong-headed primacy of etymology in the Lexicon of Suidas and others of their day, they were "not the first nor the last to have made this mistake". He goes on....."the Reformers were good biblical philologists, and in time they realized that the biblical use of the word (baptizo) was not the same ...." as that found in the Classical Greek lexicons of their day.<sup>85</sup> Thus, if in their earlier liturgical works, some Reformers had advocated immersionism, they soon came to appreciate from Biblical considerations that the central symbolism in baptism was not the death and resurrection of Christ, but of a washing from sins. As a consequence considerations of mode became secondary, with sprinkling and affusion accepted as being biblical practice as well as immersion. This feature is amply set forth if we go back again to the quotation from Calvin at the head of this article, only here we quote the *whole* paragraph, not just the isolated part of it which the modern Baptist zealously clutches at:

"Whether the person baptised is to be wholly immersed, and that whether once or thrice, or whether he is only to be sprinkled with water, IS NOT OF THE LEAST CONSEQUENCE: churches should be at liberty to adopt either, according to the diversity of climates, although it is evident that the term baptise means to immerse, and that this was the form used by the early church." (*Emph. mine, Ed.*)

The full quotation is interesting. The last sentence indicates that at this juncture Calvin was still to some degree under the influence of the lexicography of his day, but the overall statement indicates that he has thought matters through somewhat further, and that matters of mode are of secondary importance. Looked at in the full context of Institutes Ch. XV the statement evidently reflects too the fact that Calvin had come to see baptism as a ceremonial purification rite, which outwardly depicted the inward cleansing from sin resultant from the work of the Holy Spirit. We read, for instance, in para. 2 of that same chapter:

"Nay, the only purification which baptism promises is by means of the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, who is figured by water from the resemblance to cleansing and washing. "

As to the vexed text of Rom. 6: 3-4, Calvin has this to say about the words "buried with him by baptism unto death",

"By these words, he not only exhorts us to imitation of Christ, as

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* p. 273.

if he had said, that we are admonished by baptism, in like manner as Christ died, to die to our lusts, and as he rose, to rise to righteousness; but he traces the matter much higher, that Christ by baptism has made us partakers of his death, ingrafting us into it. And as the twig derives substance and nourishment from the root to which it is attached, so those who receive baptism with true faith truly feel the efficacy of Christ's death in the mortification of their flesh, and the efficacy of his resurrection in the quickening of the Spirit." (*Inst. IV ch.XV para. 5*).

If anything is evident from this, Calvin failed here to give Romans 6:3-4 the *explicit* immersionistic "spin". The text presented him with a golden opportunity to do so, had he deemed it exegetically right. And given that the quotation from paragraph 19 at the head of this article indicates that he was still partly under the influence of the faulty lexicography of his day, it is strange that he did not take the opportunity to present an outright unambivalent immersionist stance on the text if he had been possessed of any proclivities so to do. Granted that his language here can be used by immersionists, it can also equally comfortably be used by non-immersionists. And what comes through most prominently in Calvin's doctrine of baptism, is the notion of cleansing, washing, mortification of sin, purification, rather than an emphasis on "burial and resurrection" as necessitating immersion as the sole mode of administering the sacrament. This feature is emphasised when one consults Institutes book 4 ch.15 para. 14 where he says:

"...it is himself who washes and purifies us, and effaces the remembrance of our faults; that it is himself who makes us the partakers of his death....These things, I say, we ought to feel as truly and certainly in our mind as we see our body washed, immersed, and surrounded with water."

Again, one notes the lexicographical effect....he is still talking immersion, but note that it is CLEANSING that is the primary thought. Thus it is then that by para. 19 Calvin is indifferent as to mode.

The same emphasis on washing emerges in the works of the other Reformers. In fact, whereas the initial work of Luther (*Taufbüchlein*) and Leo Jud (*Baptismal Rite of Zurich*) specified immersion, from 1525 on in Zwingli's own editions of the Zurich baptismal liturgy, such specifications had disappeared, there being no rubric on the mode of baptism included. A further shift was indicated by the advent of Bullinger's first service book at Zurich, which actually went so far as to specify pouring, or affusion.<sup>86</sup>

Against this theological background the early Anabaptists developed, and it would have been understandable if initially their doctrine of baptism reflected the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p. 277.

view current amongst the Reformers as to mode. In general, however, this did not, amazingly, happen. Something else riveted their attention. Their primary aim was to shun paedobaptism, in order to facilitate pure, gathered churches. Accordingly, a clarion call went out advocating the radical reformation of the Reformed doctrine of baptism. And in all this, the mode of baptism seemed to take a back seat, the vast majority of anabaptists acquiescing in the practice of affusion.<sup>87</sup>

By 1523 there was a group of ardent anabaptists at Zurich working with Zwingli, and his refusal to take up their call for a radical reformation meant that in their eyes he had compromised with the world.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, on January 21st of that year the first anabaptist re-baptism had been performed, and the City Council took steps to disband the "conventicles" of "separatists" who were by then taking to themselves the name "Brethren in Christ".<sup>89</sup>

By 1525, at Waldshut, Balthasar Hübmaier, disappointed at the lack of progress under Zwingli's ministry, began preaching against paedobaptism, and advocated infant dedication instead. At the easter-time of that year, 300 were rebaptised in the public fountain, with Hübmaier using a bucket to pour water over them.<sup>90</sup> The revolution had begun.....a revolution which was to evince evolution in the case of Hübmaier. He might have started off with a bucket, but he graduated to a bath. This was indeed, a salient distinction for those times, as documentary evidence bears out the fact that affusion was the general mode of baptism amongst the Anabaptist sects.<sup>91</sup> But Hübmaier's development was a precursor of what was about to come about one hundred years on from then. That intervening 100 years was an era when multitudes of anabaptists spilt their blood in testimony of their faith, yet it was an era through which they not only survived, but went, ultimately, from strength to strength.

The long era of persecutions leads us to September 12th 1633, in England. On this date, says Dr. W. A. Mackay, we have the earliest record of the inauguration of an *exclusively* immersionist congregation, when one John Spilesberry set up the first known modern Baptist church.

Baptist churches indeed, there had been aplenty in the 100 years previously, but this is the first *known* EXCLUSIVE IMMERSIONIST baptist church.<sup>92</sup> It is likely

<sup>87</sup> Only Hübmaier appears to have kicked the trend here eventually. Cf. **Bridge and Phypers** Op. Cit. page 104.

<sup>88</sup> By this time the City Council of Zurich was "leaning on" Zwingli, and warning him not to take his teachings to the extent that the Church-State alliance would be broken. Cf. **Bridge and Phypers**, page 105.

<sup>89</sup> **Hughes Oliphant Old**, Op cit. pp. 92-93.

<sup>90</sup> **Ibid.** page 93.

<sup>91</sup> **Bridge and Phypers**, Op. cit. p.104.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. **Dr. W. A. Mackay**, *Immersion and Immersionists* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1880) page 50.

that others predated this one, but it is at this time that the modern baptist movement emerges to our eye on the pages of history. By 1644, seven of their London congregations issued a Confession of Faith, a revised edition of which in 1646 consisted of 51 articles, in which these modern baptists distanced themselves from any Anabaptist connections. The articles indicate a Calvinistic orthodoxy similar to Reformed churches, save that they teach exclusive immersionism as their Baptismal theology, and independency of Church government as ecclesiastical polity. By 1656, sixteen Baptist churches in Somerset issued a 46 article Confession, and the culmination of all this is found in the 1677 Confession, reprinted in 1689 with the approval and recommendation of the ministers of above 100 congregations. But prior to these Calvinistic Confessional statements, the General or Arminian baptists first published a Confession in Holland in 1611, under the direction of Smyth and Helwys, but whilst this Confession in 26 articles confines baptism to adults, nothing is said about immersion. It looks therefore, as if *exclusive* immersion first emerged into the world somewhere between the work of Smyth and Helwys, and the rise of John Spilesberry's congregation, that is, between the year 1611 and the year 1633. <sup>93</sup>

Thus we may deduce that modern *exclusive* immersionism is a dogma less than 400 years old, and that prior to 1611-1633 it was unheard of anywhere in the whole history of the Christian church.<sup>94</sup>

### THE LATER HISTORY OF EXCLUSIVE IMMERSIONISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS.

Baptists, of the Calvinistic and Arminian types, struggled against the enormous odds of Establishmentarianism in Europe and Britain throughout the period of the 17th and 18th centuries. It was probably in England in the late 18th cent. that they began to expand and blossom, a feature which was to be transferred to the emergent United States of America. Several factors are intrinsic to this phenomenon of expansion. **First** of all, the hide-bound apostasy of Establishment Reformed Churches left a spiritual vacuum, which began to be occupied by the Pietists and Moravians in Europe, and the Non-conformists in Britain. Amongst such dissenting groups the Baptists were nimble and quick off the mark to evangelise. So alert were they in the emergent American colonies that they literally "stole" thousands of Scotch-Irish immigrants of Presbyterian origins. Baptist ministers went out to the frontiers, where, it seemed, either Presbyterian ministers feared to tread, or the Presbyterian churches were too hide-bound to send out ministers to do the treading.

<sup>93</sup> On all the foregoing data concerning the Baptist creeds, Cf. **Schaff**: *The Creeds of Christendom* Vol. 1 and pages 852 ff.

<sup>94</sup> As to Hübmaier in the 1500's, it seems evident that he did not practice immersion to the extent that he totally refused fellowship to those baptised by affusion.

A large number of modern America's Baptists in their "bible belt" are in fact of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian origin. <sup>95</sup>

Similar phenomena could be noted in such places as 18th and 19th century Wales, and indeed England itself. But another, new factor was emerging on the scene now, one that was destined to put the poison in to the very heart of Protestant belief.....the factor of **subjectivism**, allied to the influx of mysticism running rampant in the Churches in the aftermath of the Evangelical Revivals. Subjectivism played into the Immersionist's hands on the matter of baptism, for as a modern American theologian has observed:

"What distinguished (the Anabaptists) as Anabaptists and distinguishes them today as Baptists was and is that in their view of baptism and the Lord's Supper they regarded these sacraments not so much as signs and seals of God's covenant toward us, but rather as actions of ours testifying to our faith. The Church for them was not coextensive with God's Covenant, but rather a society of experiential believers. This distinguishing emphasis on the individual and his experience is subjectivistic." <sup>96</sup>

In short, the new "spirit of the age" favoured the Immersionist ethos. Subjectivism began to ruin Reformed theology, and the very rise of Modernist Critical theology in the late 18th and early 19th centuries is a salient example of how subjectivism emerged to eclipse practically every major Protestant denomination. Schliermacher, the "father" of modernist theology, was born and bred in the Pietist evangelical circles of the German Reformed Churches, and founding his thought on the subjectivist "feeling of total dependence" he centred his theology on inward mystic experience, moving away from the veracity of Scripture, and even introducing and allowing critical and skeptical attitudes to it. As Peter de Yong well said, this subjectivism was the ideal booster to baptist doctrine, seeing that it fitted well with the already subjectivistic theology of personal testimony to one's own mystic "burial and resurrection" embodied in Baptist sacramental theology. Subjectivism has run rampant in Protestantism now for some 200 years, and is clearly in the ascendancy in the modern evangelical movements, with their "experience-centred" proclivities. "Feelings of love," "leadings of the spirit", and "sweet breathings"<sup>97</sup> characterise their worship, and the Bible and its doctrines get set

<sup>95</sup> A BBC television series "The Scotch-Irish in America" on Ulster Television documented this phenomenon about 10 years ago, and published a handsome book to accompany the series.

<sup>96</sup> So: **Peter Y. DeYong**, article *The Reformed Faith and the Danger of Subjectivism* in the old "**Torch and Trumpet**", journal of the "Reformed Fellowship Inc." for April 1966. This journal is now known under the name: "**The Outlook**".

<sup>97</sup> "Sweet breathings...." indeed! But that is the language of the subjectivists themselves. See **D.W. Bebbington**: *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730's to the 1980's* (London: Unwin Hyman 1989) page 171.

aside, becoming little more than some sort of subjectivistic "talisman" to propagate spiritual "kicks".

It also has to be said that "Subjectivism", swamping the theological world of the 19th cent., generated in that century a mass of schismatic sects and cults that have inhabited Christendom ever since. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, various Charismatic and Revivalistic sects, Christadelphians, numerous "Brethren" and Baptist factions, and ALL OF THESE MOVEMENTS practice baptism by Immersion, salient testimony to the effect of the Subjectivist theological method coming right through to control their theology of the sacraments.

Another factor that has given the Immersionist cause a major boost was the rise of so-called "**Biblical Theology**" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With this movement lexicography and word studies began to take the place of Systematic and Dogmatic Theology. The problem was that the lexicography was dominated by the philosophic principle known to scholars today as "Etymologism".<sup>98</sup> This was in fact a continuation of the idiosyncrasies of Suidas' 10th cent. Greek lexicon. In such works, the history (etymology) of a word would be traced back in history to its earliest known origins, and its meaning at that original point would be established as the word's *true* meaning. Thenceforth, the usage of that word would be always related to that original meaning. The upshot of this was that the verbs "bapto" and "baptizo" were heralded as meaning "to immerse" and only to "immerse". The fallacy in the whole method was of course spotted by such reformed scholars as James W. Dale in his multi-volume encyclopaedic work on those same verbs.<sup>99</sup> Dale, like the reformers, was a precursor of the modern schools of Linguistics, and like them he insisted that such features as Metonymy and culture-transference were equally of importance as Etymology. Indeed, to ignore these latter two factors is to import nonsense into the whole science of Lexicography. Thus the vast phalanx of lexicographical work from 1800 up to the 1950's is to some critical extent, spoiled, if not in some specific examples, entirely vitiated, by this

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<sup>98</sup> For a thorough exposure of "Etymologism" and its effects on Biblical exegesis and lexicography cf. especially : **James Barr**: *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford University Press 1961). Barr became Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Oxford, and one does not have to take on board his trenchant anti-fundamentalism to be able to appreciate his contribution to philology and lexicography in this work, which was the first and salient stand made against etymologism. Since that time the science of linguistics has made further advances into Lexicography, such advances actually ramifying the philological work of the Reformers, who as we have seen above in the case of Calvin, did not allow the lexicography of his day to over-rule entirely his acute philological sense. Some 60 pages of Barr's work cited herewith are given over to a critical analysis of the methodology underlying no less than **Kittel's** multi-volume *Theologisches Worterbuch zum Nuen Testament*, this having the enormous status of being virtually standard reference in the world of Lexicography.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. **BAPTIZO** a four-volume study on the usages of the Greek verbs used in baptism. Originally published in the mid-19th cent., now reprinted in the USA, by a publishing combine including Presbyterian and Reformed.

lack of appreciation of the full dimensions of linguistic exigencies.<sup>100</sup>

But it all helped the Baptists. "Look!" they would say, "Look at the Greek lexicons and concordances. Look at the word studies. They all say that we are right.....!" Today, we know different.

One further factor also boosted the baptist cause. **Technology.** It is noticeable how the modern Baptist movement has increased enormously during the last 200 years since the Industrial Revolution. To effectuate baptism by immersion, one needs water deep enough to facilitate the action. Of course, six to eight inches will be enough to immerse most people, if you lie them down and roll them into it. But this hardly expresses the "going down into" and "rising up from" that the Baptist wants to portray. A dignified, and indeed, safe, performance of immersion requires about 3 feet depth of water. In such a depth the minister can lower the candidate backwards quickly, such that the candidate's back hits the water hard enough for the natural resistance of the liquid to "bounce" the person back up before they go down too far, and risk drowning. A practised minister can produce a most dignified performance of this rite, provided he can have enough depth of water. In the old days, they used to baptize in rivers, not an easy accomplishment for immersers, because they had to wade out far enough to get the required depth. There currents could be dangerous.<sup>101</sup> And of course, you may live in a mountainous area where there are only little streams. Again, any time outside of June to September, that river water is usually going to be mighty cold. *Nil desperandum!* The Industrial Revolution gives us modern plumbing, and we can have a baptistery deep enough in churches which we can fill easily from a tap, and drain easily via the sewers, and in the meantime we can even heat the baptismal waters with a radiator or some such device.<sup>102</sup> How much more convenient it is now to baptise by immersion than it used to be in the old days of John Spilesberry, or Balthasar Hübmaier ! Doubtless, this increased convenience has facilitated a faster spread of Immersionism than hitherto acceptable or possible in the centuries prior to modern plumbing. This is the more so appreciated if we consider the climatic conditions of vast tracts of North

<sup>100</sup> For some modern and able lexicographical work on the Greek New Testament, which embodies the principles set out by the modern linguistic schools, note the two-volume: *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* compiled by **Louw and Nida** and published 1988 (1st edit.) by the United Bible Societies.

<sup>101</sup> We have at least one example of baptismal candidates being drowned in a river. The London "*Times*" for Sat. August 22nd 1992 reported how a pastor and two baptismal candidates were drowned when they were washed away during a baptism in the Vaal river between Vanderbijlpark and Sasolburg, south of the city of Johannesburg in South Africa.

<sup>102</sup> The "mod cons" are not always reliable. In an issue for May 1979 the "*Baptist Times*" reported the death of a 16 year old boy whilst he was being immersed in a baptistery at the Church of God Assembly at Galson, Ayrshire, Scotland. It seems the electric heater for warming the baptismal water malfunctioned, and electrocuted the boy. The minister was only saved by virtue of the fact that he was wearing rubber waders.

America, Northern Europe, and Russia. River baptisms in such climates can be hazardous even in summertime, and in winter the rivers freeze from the perma-frost bottoms and banks upwards and inwards. Strong men soon die in water of such low temperatures, and immersionist baptisms in such conditions put people at grave risk.

The same can be said too, of tropical climes, where the rivers do not freeze, but are hosts to such creatures as crocodiles, pirana fish, anacondas, leeches, and micro-organisms extremely hostile to human health.<sup>103</sup> Modern plumbing in Africa is a god-send for immersionists, though it must be said that great care must be taken even so, as drains etc, in tropical countries tend to host numerous undesirable, and dangerous creatures.<sup>104</sup>

In short, immersionism is at least a difficult, and often a hazardous ritual to implement unless you have the benefits of modern plumbing. How such a ritual was to have been adopted by the churches of 2000 years ago without the benefit of "moderns" would be a study all by itself.

It is now necessary to look at the effects of Exclusivist Immersionism as they impinge on the modern ecclesiastical scene.

If baptism may be validly performed using a mode other than full immersion, then immediately the foundation for the modern Baptist's ecclesiastical justification is broken. The whole point of having "Baptist", i.e., "immersionist" churches as separate from non-immersionist churches is in order to establish "proper" churches, as per the alleged New Testament principles. By baptist standards, a non-immersionist church is not a true church, seeing that its "members" have not been correctly initiated into the fellowship of Christ, and are living in some kind of serious disobedience to the heavenly commands. Any position less than this destroys the fundamental *raison d'etre* for having immersionistic churches. For the baptist to adopt

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<sup>103</sup> We refer again to the Anglican Evangelical missionary, Rev. Canon M.H. Garner, M.A. Whilst a missionary in the West Nile district of Uganda, it fell to him to baptise some 600 people. His convictions on baptism were immersionist, and he set to immersing all his catechumens. As a result, he contracted the disease Bilharzia, or Schistosomiasis, directly from contact with the river water. This today, though a serious disease, is not necessarily fatal, as it responds to modern medicines. However, in any age pre-antibiotic (which means up to the 1940's) contraction of bilharzia was a death sentence. For the information on Rev. Canon Garner, cf. *The Churchman's Magazine* for May-June 1983 and the first page "Portrait Gallery." He required hospitalization in Kampala and London having contracted the disease, after which it was "considered unwise for him to return to Africa."

<sup>104</sup> I once witnessed a movie film taken by a Pentecostal missionary of the *Congo Evangelistic Mission* in the Katanga district of the old Belgian Congo (nowadays Zaire). It showed immersionistic practice in the jungle. They actually had to dig a hole in the ground and fill it by carrying pots of water from a well or somewhere. This worked alright for one baptismal session, but some months later, an attempt to use the stagnant pool for another baptismal session was held up while first the snakes were all dealt with. Then, as the ritual proceeded, they discovered that there were leeches in the water.....and etc.

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a more embracing view of non-immersed Christians would be for him to say *de facto* that "immersionism" doesn't really matter. This would have a knock-on effect, as *de facto* it would imply that "baptist" churches as such shouldn't exist, but that they, like other churches, should tolerate aspersion/affusion with immersionism.

In order therefore, to protect their own position, Baptists are *logically impelled* into EXCLUSIVISTIC immersionism. Many modern Baptists do not go this far, in fact, probably a large number, if not the majority of Baptist Union churches in the British Isles have liberalised their position on this under Ecumenicalist pressures. But the force of the logic means that such liberalisation will ultimately mean the destruction of their churches as a separate and distinctive witness to the very sacramental issue for which such churches were originally incepted.

The immersionist logic therefore impels one to EXCLUSIVISM. Those Baptists who dig their heels in and refuse to budge on this issue cannot avoid falling into the exclusivist abyss. To practice this one is forced to argue that non-immersed professors of faith are not as yet, fully obedient to the Lord, and are not as yet, Christians in good standing. This means their exclusion from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which is effectively excommunication. No escape exists from the inexorability of the logic here, once accept a non-immersed believer to the Lord's Supper, you are declaring that person as being in good standing of membership in the Body of Christ, and thereby, eligible, and acceptable, as a member of your baptist church, if they should so apply for it.

On this factor, some modern baptists find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. One faction will practice strict exclusivism, of such a kind that would have excluded such non-immersionist stalwarts of the faith as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones from holy communion and membership in their churches. Others, a little more catholic in their proclivities would accept a Lloyd-Jones to the Lord's Supper, but not church membership. This latter group involve themselves then in the gross inconsistency of saying that this brother is of good enough standing to partake of the Holy Communion, and thereby is good enough in standing to partake of membership in the Universal Body of Christ, BUT, he is not good enough to be accepted into membership of THEIR congregation until he submits to immersion. *De facto*, this means that membership of THEIR congregation requires a higher level of righteousness than membership of the Universal Body of Christ. The New Testament has a name for this kind of nonsense. Pharisaism.

Indeed, it is the "Strict" kind of Baptist church that is the type that honestly follows Baptist logic to its full implications. However, this impels them into the following practical difficulties:

- (i) they may not invite into their pulpit a visiting minister who is not an exclu-

sive immersionist, for if they do, they accept such a non-immersionist in the role of a teaching elder, and it would be utterly incongruous to deny such a one holy communion afterwards, and then church membership. Hosts of immersionistic churches break these principles left, right and centre, when they invite into their midst Scots Presbyterian ministers, or such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, to minister from their pulpits, yet at the same time, deny to non-immersionist believers membership in their own congregations. The New Testament has a name for this kind of practice, too. Hypocrisy.

(ii) Strict Baptists who regularly consult the commentaries and Theological works of non-immersionists are effectively allowing such allegedly "disobedient-to-Christ" practitioners to have the role of a teaching elder in their lives and in their ministry.

It amazes one to see how, on the study shelves of Baptist ministers, one will find rank upon rank of Presbyterian and Reformed works. This always seems very peculiar, that those who are allegedly disobedient to Christ on an issue great enough to justify separate denominations are nevertheless regularly consulted as to the interpretation of Scripture. I noted too, that if the Presbyterian and Reformed works were removed from such libraries, there would be at most only about one third, or more likely, less than a quarter, of the books left.

It ever seems peculiar that such allegedly "disobedient-to-Christ" theologians were so necessary in an immersionist's library. And this anomaly is one that extended to the library of no less than one Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Now there was a logically inconsistent Baptist, if ever there was one. But his godly catholicism prevented him from going the whole hog of the baptist logic in his practice, whatever else he might have said from the pulpit or in his written works. Thus we find that he even preached the inaugural sermons at the opening of Dr. John Kennedy's new Presbyterian Church at Dingwall in Scotland,<sup>105</sup> an action in and of itself a total denial of the Baptist position. For in so doing, Spurgeon was *de facto* announcing to the world that he believed and accepted Kennedy's paedo-baptistic and non-immersionist church to be a true church. He eulogised Kennedy too, and was a long-time friend of the man.<sup>106</sup> One can see however, how Spurgeon's catholicism here would have nevertheless involved him in hypocrisy back home at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. For there, non-immersed believers would be denied

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<sup>105</sup> On the 17th May 1870. In addition to this, Spurgeon had in 1866 addressed the General Assemblies of both the Free Kirk and the United Presbyterian Church. Cf. *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* page 455-456 & 790. *De facto* this was in principle unavoidably a tacit recognition and admission by this Baptist leader that such Paedobaptist churches were true churches in good standing.

<sup>106</sup> After Kennedy's death in 1884, Spurgeon wrote eulogistically of him to the widow, using these very words concerning Kennedy: "I venerated him (Kennedy) AS EVERY INCH A MAN OF GOD.....he was TRUE AS STEEL AND FIRM AS A ROCK....." (Emph. mine Ed.) The full text of the letter can be read in **Auld's** biography of Kennedy, where it appears photo-facsimile in Spurgeon's own handwriting. Yet Kennedy was a Paedo-baptist, inelligible for membership at Spurgeon's Tabernacle !

membership. Even the great Dr. Kennedy would have suffered exclusion from there!

In short, it is astounding how many allegedly (in baptist terms) "disobedient-to-Christ" Christians proved to be such stalwart Saints of God. I mean.....Augustine, Gotteschalk, Bradwardine, Luther, Knox, Calvin, Turretin, Witsius, Brainerd, .....one could go on and on and on.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this four-part study we have traced the rise of Immersionism from some time in the late 2nd Cent. AD. At first a pagan rite performed in an octagonal pool as an initiation into the "Mysteries" of ancient Roman religions, the immersionistic method of baptism infiltrated the ranks of Christian professors. By the 4th cent. AD, after the post-Constantinian Establishment of Christianity as the State Territorial Religion, the influx of pagan mysteries into the churches was consolidated, and given additional impetus. Popery, the Mass, and Mariolatry invaded the institutional body ecclesiastic, pagan feasts were "christianised" and imposed on the Church calendar, and the initiation rite of baptism became officially paganised in the Immersionistic form brought in from the Mystery cults. In that 4th cent. we find the first exegetical connection made between water baptism and Rom. 6:4/Col.2:12, and the "dying-rising" motif became the paramount focus of Christian baptism, rather than a ceremonial and symbolic "washing" or "cleansing" from sin. In accordance with the Mystery cults, the "immersionism" of "dying-rising" was thenceforth only undertaken at the pagan spring festival, which had been imported into the Church and denominated "Eostre", or "Easter".

Whilst Immersionism thenceforward was the regnant theology in the Roman church, EXCLUSIVE immersion was never countenanced at that time, since an accommodating provision was made for the sick and the aged, and those in cold climes, to receive baptism by aspersion or sprinkling.

Throughout the Dark Ages (post 530 AD approx.) baptismal fonts deep enough to immerse gradually became more widespread, despite artistic and architectural iconography which, "frozen" from Classical times, depicted baptism as traditionally being affusion or sprinkling. In this period the pagan Octagonal form of the Mystery cult baptisteries became a popular design, and is evinced still today in the thousands of octagonal fonts still in British parish churches, which, though not designed for immersion, nevertheless still reflect the old pagan 8-sided design.

By late medieval times, the Roman church had given up on trying to superimpose Immersionism as standard practice. Inconvenience, climate, and public health matters played a big part in the retention of aspersion.

At the Reformation, the Reformers first trying to re-establish pure churches, aimed at instituting immersionism. Philological studies of the Bible language and vocabularies, plus inconvenience, climate, and health matters, meant that they took aspersion as the normative mode, with its key focus on symbolic cleansing from sin.

The Anabaptists arose prominently in the 16th cent., and took an anti-paedo-baptistic stance, but did not, (except in one instance) practice Immersionism. Instead, their mode of practice was affusion.

By the early 17th cent. EXCLUSIVE IMMERSIONISM emerged into history for the first time.

Exclusive Immersionism suddenly exploded into a world-dominating position amongst Evangelical churches as from the early 19th cent. Aiding this explosion was:

- (i) The deadness and apostasy of the Reformed State Territorial Churches.
- (ii) The rise of Subjectivism in Theology and Philosophy favouring the Immersionist interpretation of the Sacraments.
- (iii) The fallacy of "Etymologism" in Lexicographical Studies.
- (iv) The rise and development of the Industrial Revolution, modern plumbing techniques securing for the first time a convenient and relatively safe provision for performing the Immersionist rite.

Hence we conclude that modern Exclusivist Immersionist Sacramental theology is:

- (a) A Johnny-come-lately on the Ecclesiastical scene.
- (b) Has no exegetical connection to Scripture prior to the 4th cent. AD.
- (c) Is unnecessarily divisive of Christians and their churches.

All this is not to condemn Baptists as non-Christians. A Presbyterian can accept that an Immersed person has had a valid form of Baptism. (The problem is that the Baptist won't allow the same privilege to the Presbyterian.) Also, it must be acknowledged that many godly Calvinistic Baptists have done sterling service to the furtherance of God's Kingdom and His glory. They are to be commended for their diligent evangelism, their emphasis on "gathered churches", and their efforts to uphold the principle of discipline in the body ecclesiastic.

Presbyterian and Paedo-baptistic churches need to learn these desirable features, but without ditching their proper Reformed and Scriptural doctrines of the Covenant and the Sacraments. Paedo-baptism does not need Establishment Territorialism in order to function, and indeed only functions correctly and Scripturally under a "gathered church" principle, which latter also facilitates godly Scriptural discipline.

*Concluded.*