

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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HOUSEHOLD COMMUNION

The 20th Century has probably re-evaluated the sacraments more than any other period in history. One might even say that we are in the midst of a "sacramental shake-up." What are some of the issues?

There is the issue of the administration of the sacraments. The post Vatican II Roman Catholic Church allows for "lay" participation in the administration of the Eucharist. In both Protestant and Catholic Churches, women are serving the sacraments. I should add that the Roman Church now allows laymen to receive the Cup. The student of history will perhaps recall that the Cup was taken away from laymen several centuries ago. It's all been changed in the 20th Century, and particularly, the last twenty years.

Other evidence of the "shake-up" is the theological criss-cross among Catholics and Protestants. Louis Bouyer, a priest of the French Oratory and Professor of Spiritual Theology at the famed Institut Catholique in Paris and a prolific writer, comes from the Catholic tradition but advocates a Calvinian view of the sacraments.

Having been a Lutheran before he converted to Catholicism, he rejects Luther's view because he understands that consubstantiation is a variation of transubstantiation. Apparently, only Calvin's view avoids the ancient heresy of monophysitism, the belief that one can become one nature with deity. He believes that the Calvinistic interpretation of the sacrament best represents the historic Catholic Church. Presently, he is having considerable influence among Catholic thinkers.

Baptism Issues

In the midst of this "shake-up," baptism has not been left out. The main issue has been infant baptism. A Roman Catholic writer sums up the controversy.

It began to appear (1937-1964) that fresh work on baptism itself was urgently in order. . . The work was begun in continental Reformed Churches with an attack on infant baptism, mounted less on biblical than personalist-philosophical grounds, by Emil Brunner in 1937. This elicited agreement by Karl Barth in 1943 that baptism, being essentially an act of faith requiring cognition, lay beyond infant capacity. The same tack was taken up and expanded into an attack on the sacramentality of baptism itself by his son, Markus Barth, in 1951. The scale of attack by three of Europe's best known Protestant scholars evoked a defense of infant baptism and, at least to some extent, its sacramental nature and liturgical mobility by other Reformed theologians such as F.J. Venenhardt, P.C. Marcel, and Oscar Cullmann. Lutherans also joined the debate, early among them Joachim Jeremias supporting the Cullman group, and Kurt Aland in opposition.

Kavanagh is fairly accurate in his assessment, but there is one glaring mistake. Although Barth gave his lecture after Brunner, Barth was probably the controlling influence of the two. Not only did Barth's ideas dominate Brunner, but a number of other thinkers in the Western Church. He seems to be the pivotal figure in the great infant baptism debate.

Karl Barth gave his famous lecture on baptism to a group of Swiss theological students at Gwatt am Thunersee. The German title was *Kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe* to be printed as No. 14 of the series of *Theologische Studien*. The English translation of the lecture was called

Barth makes it clear that he wants to challenge the "from generation to generation" idea.² What does he mean? Historically the Church has believed that the children of believers are claimed by God. In this sense faith is transferred from one generation to another, from parent to child. Barth disagrees. He argues for a radically "dynamic" faith. The faith of the child comes apart from any relationship to the parents' faith. Infant baptism is therefore unnecessary.

I can see Barth's concerns. He wanted to protect the integrity of faith and the Sovereignty of God. Those are legitimate concerns. Anyone who believes in the Bible should have them. But bad presuppositions breed bad conclusions. Barth had a "non-covenantal" view of faith and ends up with a "non-covenantal" view of the family and church. His view of God was that He is so transcendent that He operates apart from the covenantal structure. He defines transcendence as **distance**, the typical pagan designation, and as such, he obliterates "means." The result is that faith does not come through the covenantal faithfulness of God to families, but it only comes to individuals as they personally make the word into the **Word** of God. For Barth, the Word of God did not truly become the Word of God until it entered one's personal experience. So faith could only mystically come to the "individual" apart from the covenantal unit.

At any rate, Barth made a statement. He made it at an important time. Whether he was the first to make it, I don't know. But I do know that theologians of the Western Church, Protestant and Catholic, have rallied around his views. Why? I believe that Barth expressed a position on the sacrament consistent with the intellectual "mind-set" of his times.

Barth's influence, however, did not stop. It spread from Europe to America, and even to the Evangelical Church. Paul Jewett's has become an example of one thinker's attempt to pull Barth over into the Evangelical community. He attempted

1. Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Doubleday, 1974) 107-108.

2. Karl Barth, *The Church* (London: S. C. M. Press 1948) pp 42-46.

Baptism (London:

to clean up Barth's positions, but his presuppositions and arguments basically became a rehash with a little more history, theology, and rhetoric.

John Murray, the great Reformed theologian and late Professor of Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) tried to answer Jewett's position in his work,

But Murray's reasoning did not cut to the heart of Jewett or Barth, and his writing style is difficult to follow.

In a much more effective way, Meredith Kline's *By* is a better defense of infant baptism. He fairly effectively shows a continuity between circumcision and baptism. This connection has always been at the heart of the paedobaptist's (infant baptism) defense. The thinking goes like the following: circumcision was applied to Old Covenant infants (male); baptism is the replacement of circumcision; therefore, baptism ought to be applied to infants (male and female) in the New Covenant.

Kline, however, gives it all away. His view of the Law builds on certain presuppositions that his opponents apply to baptisms. They reject infant baptism on the same grounds that he fails to extend the Mosaic Law into the New Testament. My only point in mentioning the development from Barth to Kline is to give the reader a "feel" for the influence of Barth. It has been far reaching and circumscribed much of the conversation about baptism.

Communion Issues

Barth's influence is so strong that one tends to miss other issues that have arisen, namely, infant **communion**. At the same time that a radical individualism has invaded the church to influence it away from household baptism, new interest has developed concerning the second sacrament. Ironically, where it has been difficult to persuade some people of household **baptism**, it has been almost faddish to institute household **infant-to-young-child-communion** among others.

This practice admits baptized children to the Lord's table prior to confirmation or catechism for various reasons: some admit purely on the basis of baptism while others permit it on the basis of baptism plus some sort of profession of faith at an early age. The age will vary from church to church as to the precise age a baptized child is allowed to commune. The churches that allow children to communion according to their baptism will give infants communion. Others wait until the children can at least say that they love Jesus and Bible stories. Still others will wait until school age or a little later. For all of these groups, however, communion is being given before a formal ceremony of re-affirmation of faith.

This practice of allowing infants and young children to communion is being reconsidered by Protestant and Catholic groups more than ever since the 12th century in the Western Church. At that time the practice was abolished in the West as a result of the effect of the doctrine of transubstantiation. The laymen of the day wanted the cup taken away from them because the administration of magically changed elements risked spilling the "real" Jesus if dropped on the floor. For the same reason they wanted both elements removed from the children, who would certainly be more apt to spill the physical body and blood of Jesus.

Today, however, some Protestant Churches have already adopted the practice of paedocommunion (infant or young child communion), and in almost every major conservative Reformed Church, the issue is being debated. Catholic writers are also proposing the same. Tad Guzie

argues for an "integrated" view of the sacraments whereby continuity between baptism and communion is restored.⁴

The reasons for a reconsideration of paedocommunion vary from liberal to conservative groups. Liberals have preferred for the practice to be re-instituted because they believe that children are born converted and thereby entitled to communion. Some Catholics, on the other hand, have wanted the sacrament to be given to children because they believe the Holy Supper will automatically **save**.

For other more solid Biblical reasons, however, conservative Protestants have introduced it; in their case, it would be practiced for the **first** time because paedocommunion never became part of the official agenda of Protestantism, except in Hungary. Some reformed groups that believe children become members of the **covenant** at the time of baptism would therefore argue that these same children should be allowed to have communion **because** they are members of the covenant in good standing. They maintain that covenantal children are entitled to come to the table because the young ones have not visibly rejected the covenant, the only basis for suspending and certainly excommunicating someone from the Table.

Protestants who believe this way do not **advocate** that communion should be granted because the waters of baptism automatically save. Nor do they believe that the Lord's Supper mechanically transfers grace to the recipient. Neither would they hold that communion should be given on the basis of an **articulated** faith, which may or may not be sincere. Rather, they advocate that the Eucharist is given according to **covenantal faithfulness**. In the case of a young infant, they point out that the **child** has obeyed for his (her) age to the fullest extent possible; he (she) has been baptized. Thus, until baptism vows are broken or denied, communion should be given; it is necessary for normative spiritual growth.

I agree with this **covenantal** view of communion. In the two previous issues of *Journal of Covenantal Theology*, I spoke about a **covenantal** approach to baptism. I have referred to the historic hymn, *The Lorica*, and I have examined household baptisms in the New Testament. I concluded that God makes a covenant with the entire household through the covenantal head of the house: when an adult unbeliever converts, his (her) household is also claimed. Why? God is a **covenantal** God who deals **covenantally** with the earth; He does not simply covenant with individuals (nominalism), nor does he exclusively speak to the group apart from the individual (realism). He claims the entire household.

Covenantal Communion

The Apostle Paul apparently extends this same household principle to communion. He says,

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and **all ate the same spiritual food**; and **all drank the same spiritual drink**, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and **the rock was Christ** (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

What is the **covenantal** principle? All **who were baptized were entitled to eat**. The text is clear that **all** were "baptized unto Moses." Who was included in the **all**? **Every** household in Israel. Historically, those who believe in infant baptism have pointed to this passage to establish that baptism was **covenantally** applied. I agree, but we should not stop at baptism, the first sacrament.

Who was included in the second **all**, referring to those who ate? Every household in Israel. In other words, just as all Israel was covenantally united to Moses, all Israel was covenantally allowed to eat **spiritual food**. This fits with the rest of Scripture. There are essentially two sacraments: a threshold/boundary (usually water) sacrament and a dominion/food sacrament, food representing the conquest of the land which is offered up to God. The Western Church has tried to say that baptism is received on the basis of the covenant and therefore applied to **covenantal** units. But regarding the second sacrament, it has argued that communion is applied to individuals.

According to Paul's comments in the I Corinthian's passage, however, the second sacrament should also be applied **covenantally**. Make no mistake, Paul goes out of his way to clarify that the food (including the drink) referred to was **covenantal** food; it was food that symbolized and sealed to Israel the covenant itself; it was sacramental food; it represented the covenant with God. How? It was food that came from heaven in the form of manna, quail and water from the rock; it all came from God. It brought life and death in that Israel's response to this food ratified the covenant and its rebellion to the food represented total apostasy resulting in death. It literally represented **Christ**, as Paul says.

In other words, the reception of this food and water was a covenant renewing process, no less than being baptized unto Moses was a covenant ratifying process. Partaking of the food and water was communion with Christ, just as eating the Lord's Supper is communion with Jesus in the New Covenant. Our Lord parallels the two when He says, "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.' Jesus therefore said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. I am the bread of life' " (John 6:31-35). The reception of the manna was ratification of the covenant; the reception of Christ was the reception of the New Covenant.

The best way to see the covenantal parallels is by a close examination of the manna and water passages in Exodus. Both are covenantal in their structure and message. As such, both indicate that the reception of manna and the water from the rock was participation in the covenant itself. Let's first examine carefully the manna passage.

The Covenantal Structure of Exodus 16: Manna

The most glaring indication that this passage is structured according to the covenant are the **depository** arrangements at the end of the chapter (Exodus 16:31-35). They were standard arrangements found at the end of suzerainty treaty documents pertaining to how the testimony of the covenant was to be preserved for a witness, informing other witnesses from future generations so as to create a dynamic succession to the covenant relationship. Moses and Aaron were commanded to keep some of the manna in the Ark of the covenant as a "testimony before the Lord" (Exodus 16:34). Kline says regarding the fifth (successional) section of Deuteronomy (31-34),

Included here are the final two standard elements in the classic treaty structure. One is the enlisting of witnesses to the covenant. The **other customary feature is the direction for the depositing of the treaty text** in the sanctuary and for its periodic reproclamation (31 :9-13). This arrangement, while it was a means for the inspirational instruction of successive generations in the words of God's law (31 :12,

13:32:46), was yet another witness to the covenant (31:26).⁵

With this hint about the **covenantal** nature of the provision of the manna, the rest of the passage takes clear shape.

Transcendence

Then, the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. And it will come about on the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily" (Exodus 16:1-5).

God speaks in response to the grumbling of the **Israelites**. When He does, He makes a covenant with them in the form of a promise. He begins this covenant with the standard introductory covenant formula, "The Lord said." He then identifies Himself as the great Suzerain, Sovereign, by detailing exactly what He will provide for His people. By this identification, He declares Himself to be **transcendent** and **present** (immanent).

Hierarchy

So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of **Israel**, "At evening you will know that the Lord has brought you out of the land of Egypt; and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, for He hears your grumbling against the Lord; and what are we, that you grumble against us?" And Moses said, "This will happen when the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the Lord hears your grumbling which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumbling are not against us but against the Lord." Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before the Lord, for He has heard your grumbling.' " (Exodus 16:6-12).

God spoke to Moses in the transcendence section, but now Moses speaks to Aaron and Aaron to the people, a clear hierarchy of communication. Also, Moses and Aaron defend themselves against the people. As representatives of the Lord, they are attacked because the people are angry with God.

Ethics

When the sons of Israel saw it [manna], they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "it is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has **commanded**, 'Gather of it every man as much as he should eat . . .'" And Moses said to them, "Let no man leave any of it until morning." But they **did not listen** to Moses, and some left part of it until morning (Exodus 16:13-31).

The **ethics** emphasis of this segment describes how Israel had to be "commanded" a second time to pick up the manna, after it was actually provided. They saw no connection between what God had said that He would do and what actually happened. Furthermore, they did not believe that God's Word would be fulfilled a second day. Maybe they thought the manna the first day was a "natural" occurrence. Whatever they thought, they didn't believe the manna came from God's promised Word. They tried

to leave some manna on the ground until the morning. The leftover manna spoiled and angered Moses.

Oath (Sanctions)

Now it came about on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread. So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul, nor was there any worm in it. And Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. . . . So the people rested on the seventh day (Exodus 16:22-30).

This section concerns the special provision of manna for the Sabbath Day. The Sabbath was a special day to renew the covenant. It was also a time of judgment: judgment unto life and death: a time to be approved or disapproved by God. In the Exodus 16 passage, the people are told to eat up all of the manna as a witness to their faith. How so? If they didn't eat then they were saying that they didn't think God would provide again. And, if they said that, then they really didn't believe that God had provided the first time. Thus, the Sabbath Day in the wilderness was a special time of renewing the oath of allegiance to the Lord of the covenant by consuming **all** of the bread. This total consumption of the bread points to the great Eucharistic sacramental meal instituted by Christ, confirming the oath/ratification theme. At the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, "Drink ye all of it" (KJV, Matthew 26:27). In connection with the sacramental meals in the wilderness, Christ was telling the disciples to consume all of the elements of communion not because they were magically changed, but as a covenantal witness to God's faithful provision of spiritual food.

Succession

And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations." As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept (Exodus 16:31-36).

I have already mentioned that these depository arrangements are a clear reference to the treaty pattern. But why were these arrangements made at the end? Kline explains,

The suzerain would naturally want to possess, preserve, and protect a sealed legal witness to the treaty. . . It would remind him [vassal] of his suzerain's role as the vassal's protector and of the various specific promises of assistance often contained in such treaties.⁶

Thus, the provision of manna to which Paul refers in I Corinthians 10 was a covenantal act, covenantally received by the covenantal households of Israel. But what about the water passage that Paul describes as the "drinking of the spiritual rock"? As we shall see, it too is structured by the covenant principles.

The Covenantal Structure of Exodus 17: Water

We are provided at the end of the chapter with the same kind of covenantal indicator that we saw in Exodus

16. Moses says, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.'" And Moses built an altar, and named it The Lord is My Banner" (Exodus 17:14-15). These are the same kind of standard depository arrangements made at the end of the covenant. Thus, Exodus 17 is also a covenant event. A brief overview confirms this covenantal interpretation.

Transcendence (Exodus 17:1)

Verse one says, "The congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed according to the **command** of the Lord," literally, "**Mouth** of the Lord." This fits the standard introductory pattern of the covenant, "The Lord **spoke**," or, "According to all that the Lord **commanded**" (Deut. 1:3). In other words, the transcendent/immanent Word of God was leading them.

Hierarchy (Exodus 17:2-4)

The people revolt against God's hierarchy, making this chapter a form of covenant lawsuit. Normally, the second segment consists of **interrogation** as a part of the lawsuit, and this is precisely what we see at this point in the text. The **people** "quarreled" with Moses (Exodus 17:2), which resulted in his interrogation of them: "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord" (Exodus 17:2). Of course, the people rejoice with their own interrogation, implying that they were also bringing lawsuit against Moses: notice that they say, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt" (Exodus 17:3).

Ethics (Exodus 17:5-7)

The third section of a covenantal lawsuit presents an indictment by exposing unfaithfulness. In the Exodus 17 passage, God indicts Israel and exposes their unfaithfulness by commanding Moses to strike the rock with the same rod that had defeated Egypt and divided the Red Sea.

Oath (Exodus 17:8-13)

The fourth stage of covenantal lawsuit was a declaration of the people's guilt. In this case, God declares Israel's guilt by giving them a victory on the basis of Moses' raised hands. As Moses goes through the actions of making a new oath to God with his upward stretched hand, He acquits His servant of Israel's indictment against him. When the hand of blessing, one of the sanctions of the fourth segment of the covenant, is raised, Israel wins. When it is down, Israel starts to lose.

Succession (Exodus 17:14-16)

In addition to the other successional comments referred to a moment ago, the chapter concludes with a clear successional statement, "And Moses said, 'The Lord has sworn; the Lord will have war against Amalek from **generation to generation**' " (Exodus 17:16).

Thus, Exodus 17 clearly follows the pattern of the covenant. And now we can appreciate the full covenantal context of Paul's comments in I Corinthians 10. The import of all of this is that Paul's reference to the Exodus background proves that a basic covenantal principle is being pulled forward into the New Covenant: **all those who are baptized in the covenant get to eat and drink the covenant**. Since households are to be baptized, so are households to participate in Holy Communion!

6. Kline,

Biblical Authority, p. 124.