

PARENTS AND INFANT BAPTISM (1966)

In common with the general body of the Church of Christ, we affirm that a solemn obligation to Christ, the Church and the child rests upon parents to present their children to Christ in Baptism, which claims for them all the benefits of His redeeming work and signifies their admission into the visible community of His Church.

We likewise affirm the joint responsibility of the Church and the parents or guardians of the child presented for Baptism for the due honouring of the pledges solemnly undertaken in this Sacrament; and emphasise the great importance of such procedure as shall ensure that, so far as lies in our power, the undertaking shall be entered into with understanding and sincere purpose, since otherwise the Sacrament may be degraded to the level of mere social custom or superstition.

We are presented with cause for serious misgiving by those parents who request Baptism for their children but themselves acknowledge no vital relationship with the Christian Church. In view of the considerable number of these today, we recommend a certain normal procedure as highly desirable. In the Methodist Church, with its widely varying local conditions, there are difficulties in obtaining detailed uniformity, but we strongly urge the attempt to follow as faithfully as possible the principles set forth in the following recommendations. Their purpose is to ensure that the use of this Sacrament shall never be casual or unenlightened, and that the considerations set out in this Statement shall be safeguarded to the utmost of our power. The due and proper administration of Holy Baptism is an essential part of the pastoral office of the Church.

- (i) *Intimation.* Before every administration of Baptism seven days' notice (save in exceptional circumstances) should be required of the parents or guardians to the Minister, in order to permit of interview and preparation.
- (ii) *Preparation.* As soon as possible after notice has been given, full enquiry should be made and all necessary instruction and exposition of the service given by the Minister, a Deaconess, or some other competent and instructed Leader. For this purpose the parents or guardians should be visited in their home, or they should be asked to attend the Church at a convenient hour. Instruction should be regarded as particularly necessary in the case of a first child, or of the first Baptism from the home according to the Methodist rite. If the parents cannot pledge themselves to give the promises contained in the Service of Baptism, the Minister may defer the Baptism of the child.
- (iii) *Administration.* Every effort shall be made to secure the presence of both parents or guardians at the service.
- (iv) *After Baptism.* Since the parents or guardians and the Church together accept a solemn obligation for the spiritual nurture of the child, the utmost care should be taken that these obligations are fulfilled. It is the duty of parents, guardians and teachers to teach baptized children the meaning of their Baptism and so to lead them to personal faith. Personal faith leads on to full membership of the Church and thus the process of incorporation into the Church, begun in Baptism, is completed.

Periodic meetings of parents whose children are on the Baptismal Roll, and even beyond that stage, conducted by some responsible person, are strongly recommended.

The Committee is well aware that the problems caused by parents who do not carry out their promises made in the Baptismal Service have increased, rather than the reverse, since 1952. It has these and other problems fully in mind as it revises the Order of Service of Holy Baptism, and it intends to bring proposals to the Conference, the carrying out of which, it believes, will help both the Church and the parents of baptized children in the better fulfilment of their pastoral task. Meanwhile it urges ministers and laity alike to follow faithfully and carefully in each case the procedure laid down in the Statement on Holy Baptism made by the Conference of 1952.

(Minutes 1966, pp.253f)

A major report, *Christian Initiation*, was adopted by the Conference of 1997 (see Volume 2, pp. 63-101).