

theologian and artist, has deflated to the point where there is left only a humble and wondering gratitude . . . *Magne Dionysi, portas aperi Paradisi.*

REVIEWS

INFANT BAPTISM IN THE FIRST FOUR CENTURIES. By Joachim Jeremias.

Translated by David Cairns. (S.C.M. Press; 12s. 6d.)

Infant baptism became once more the object of vigorous debate among protestants with the publication in 1943 of Karl Barth's book firmly rejecting it. The present book by the eminent scholar, Professor Jeremias, will be regarded by many—and rightly so—as a decisive contribution to the controversy. Not that it is a polemical work; in fact, it is simply an exhaustive, dispassionately scientific examination of the relevant data available from the first four centuries. But the conclusion emerges clearly: from the beginning the Church baptized infants.

The new testament does not expressly mention infant baptism, nor do the first Christian writers before Tertullian, although Irenaeus's remark about the rebirth of infants is a direct enough reference to their baptism. There are, however, converging indications. Professor Jeremias gives no impression of forcing the evidence, but, with great scholarship, he draws on every source that illustrates the bearing of the various indirect references, so that his penetrating commentary leaves the reader with the conviction that the probative value of these is greater than is often supposed. This is so with the *oikos* (household) formula of Acts and Paul, the analogy with proselyte baptism and circumcision, and the baptismal significance given by the early Church

to Christ's blessing of the children (Mark 10, 13-16), which are the main items from the first period. It needs no great effort to show the outstanding importance of the later, explicit statements of Origen and Hippolytus, who stand witness for so great part of the Church, but even here the author's commentary casts fresh light on their value. For example, his remark that, since Eusebius tells us that the family of Origen had been Christian for several generations, the latter's assertion that infant baptism was of apostolic tradition could not have been made unless his father, and probably also his grandfather, had been baptized in infancy—which takes us back to the middle of the second century and probably even to the first half of that century. Lesser testimonies are made to add their weight, and a valuable feature of the book is the account of the evidence from inscriptions, which confirms the picture given by the literary sources. The last chapter deals with the crisis of the fourth century, when the custom spread of postponing baptism until the storms and stresses of youth were over. The author assesses the gravity and extent of the crisis and shows that, despite it, the practice of infant baptism went on continuously.

On one point the author changes the view he adopted in the German edition. It concerns the interpretation of I Cor. 7, 14—the difficult passage about the holiness of children born of a marriage between a Christian and a pagan. In the German edition, the author had argued that the implication of the text that children were holy merely by birth from a Christian showed that the children of Christians were not baptized. Now, he rightly doubts the validity of this reasoning. The analogy with circumcision and the fact that the similar 'sanctification' attributed to the pagan partner on account of the marriage did not obviate the necessity for his baptism on conversion means that the remark of Paul—explicable by a use of Jewish ritual terminology—in no way precludes the baptism of the children. The text, therefore, has no reference to baptism and is irrelevant to the question of infant baptism.

A theologian will want to pursue the subject of infant baptism further than this book does; for part of his task is to draw out the reasons which explain the possibility and necessity of baptizing those as yet incapable of a personal decision. Nevertheless, the starting-point must always remain the practice of the Church. Although a Catholic rests secure in the present teaching of a living tradition, a function of theology is to observe the origin and development of that tradition. Hence the theologian will find this book invaluable. And it can be recommended to all who find themselves for any reason obliged to discuss or answer questions on this matter.

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