

The Baptist System UnScriptural and UnReformed

Part Three

THE HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTIMONY

We have seen in two former articles in this series³⁶ how the implimentation of Immersionism took place in the early Papal church consequent upon the assimilation of pagan mystery rites and dogmas into the stream of Christianity during the second to fifth centuries. During this period the Lord's Supper became corrupted into the form of the Roman Mass, and a plethora of innovations distorted the fundamental simplicity of Christian baptism. Immersionism became a central dogma with the neophyte required to present in the nude for the sacrament, as was required in the Roman Mystery Religions.

And we discovered that it was not until the 4th century, that the first exegetical connections were made between Romans 6:4/Col. 2:12 and the practice of immersion.³⁷ Such sacramentarianism was centred around Easter-time, which was of course, not only the calendar date of the Lord's death and resurrection, but also of yet another pagan festival which celebrated the resurrection of natural life after the winter. The pagan notion of "dying and rising again" was thus easily blended into the main-stream of Christian liturgy, and at this time of Spring festivals the practice of immersionistic baptism connected with "dying and rising" was of course conveniently apposite.³⁸ Adult baptism in the churches became a sacrament performed-

³⁶ **British Reformed Journal** No. 29 pages 1 -9, and No. 30 pages 28 to 37.

³⁷ Cf. **Hughes Oliphant Old**: *"The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the 16th Cent."* (Grand Rapids USA: Wm B. Eerdmans 1992) page 272-3.

³⁸ Of course, the noun "Easter" is derived from a pagan religious source. The details of how "Eostre" or "easter" became grafted on to the early commemorations of Christ's death and resurrection can be found in **Alexander Hislop's work**: *"The Two Babylons"* (4th edit. publ. Partridge & Co. London 1975) and pages 103 to 113.

primarily and almost exclusively at "Easter".³⁹ And immersion in a "plunge bath" naturally encapsulated the whole meaning and philosophy of this festival, originally pagan, but now itself absorbed into Christianity via the papistic policy of conquering pagan faiths by means of assimilation.

In tracking the history of this development, three salient features stand out.

First, there is the fact that in Classical, Judaic, Johannine, Christic and Patristic usage, "baptism" did not mean "immersion", but signified the application of water in order to effect (Classical) or symbolize (Johannine, Christic and Patristic) inner purification.. Thus, in Christian baptism the application of the water of baptism symbolized the inner Baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, and via this inward spiritual baptism, *incorporation into Christ*.⁴⁰ As such the application of water was not expressive of mode, hence the Scriptures can speak of "sprinklings" as baptisms, and of the "outpouring" of the Holy Spirit as a baptism. Whilst plunge immersionism is not ruled out as a valid means of applying water sacramentally to the individual, it is certainly not mandated by the meaning of the Biblical terms used to delineate "baptism", nor is it mandated by the Scriptural descriptions of such activities.....witness the "diverse washings" (actually it says "baptisms" in the Greek) of Hebrews 9: 10 which refer to the Mosaic "sprinklings" of Leviticus 14:6-7; Num. 8:7; 19:11-13, Psalm 51:7; Ezek. 36:25-27, and to the "baptism with the Holy Spirit" of Acts ch. 2. If mode is at all expressed, it is "sprinkling" or "affusion", and actually no case can be made out from Scripture anywhere that would mandate "immersion".⁴¹

³⁹ Cf. **Charles Thomas**: *"Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500"* (London: Batsford Academic 1981) pages 212-213. Thomas notes that: "the use of seasons other than Easter or Pentecost for Baptism were progressively condemned by Church Councils in the 5th and 6th centuries as inappropriate and out of step.." This salient feature indicates the impact of the pagan mystery religions affecting baptism in an ever-increasing manner as the centuries roll by.

⁴⁰ Cf. the monumental tomes of **James Wilkinson Dale**, 4 volumes numbering some 1852 pages containing the most exhaustive analysis of the usage of the greek verbs "bapto" and "baptizo" ever undertaken. It was produced in response to the Baptist work "Baptizein" by Thomas Conant, and one can only say that Dale's work wipes the floor with Conant. First published in about 1867-1874 these four tomes have been reprinted in the last 10 or 12 years of the 20th Cent. by a Publishing combine including the American Presbyterian and Reformed company. The titles of the 4 volumes are respectively: *"Classic Baptism"*, in which Dale examines the usage of the baptismal verbs in the Greek of the Classical period, then *"Judaic Baptism"* in which he examines their usage in Jewish circles, *"Johannine Baptism"* concerning the baptism of John the Baptist, and finally, *"Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism"* in which he analyses the usage of the baptismal verbs as found in the New Testament and in the early church "fathers".

⁴¹ A most useful and easily readable little book that examines all the New Testament evidence is: *"Baptism, its Meaning and Subjects"* by **Michael Kimmitt**. (K&M Books 1997 ISBN 0 9523041 1 2). In this work the author judiciously examines all NT baptism references as to mode, and finds himself (very rationally, we are convinced) drawn to the conclusion that no-where in the NT can one make out a certain case for immersionism, but all instances indicate *most probably* affusion or sprinkling.

Further ramifying this linguistic evidence is the fact, missed completely by Immersionists, that other words existed in the vocabulary of the Koine Greek which could have been used by the inspired writers of the Scriptures if they had wanted to specify "immersion" most definitely. The puritan John Owen had isolated this feature over 300 years ago.⁴² He noted that two Greek verbs were used in the New Testament to signify "baptism". They are βαπτω ("bapto") and βαπτίζω ("baptizo"). Manifestly the linguistic evidence shouts they cannot be used to unambiguously mandate "immersion", so as Owen says, if the apostles had definitely wished to mandate immersionism, why did they not use the two compound modified forms of those verbs, that are to be found in the Greek language? Owen is referring here to the verbs ἐμβάπτω ("embapto") and ἐμβαπτίζω ("embaptizo"). The reader will note that a prefix ἐμ ("em") is found in front of these latter two verbs. This "em" is in fact the greek preposition ἐν ("en"), which can mean "in" as well as "with". The "en" is mutated to "em" because when a nasal sound 'n' falls before a labial sound (like 'b') it changes to another labial, in this case "m". (The reader should try pronouncing "eNbapto" and then try pronouncing ""eMbapto". He will find the latter easier, his lip-formation flowing from the 'm' into the 'b' more smoothly than from an 'n'. to a 'b'.) Now, these two verbs are the modified or compounded form of the original "bapto" etc, and signify without doubt....immersion by an act of dipping. It is that proposition "en" or "in" that enforces this conclusion, and indeed the actual usage of these modified forms in Classical and Koine greek bears that out. Indeed, only "embapto" of the two is found at all in the Greek New Testament, used on 3 occasions, once in each of three parallel passages in the Synoptic gospels to indicate Judas "dipping" his hand in the bowl, or to the Lord "dipping" the morsel of bread in the bowl before handing it to Judas. (John 13:26). In Classical greek the same usage pertained, as is recorded in Liddell-Scott's lexicon. YET THE SACRED PENMEN OF SCRIPTURE AVOIDED USING THESE COMPOUNDED FORMS OF THE VERBS IN ALL REFERENCES TO BAPTISM.

The conclusion is inescapable. If the apostles had absolutely definitely wanted to mandate "immersion", leaving no doubts at all, then they used the wrong verbs!

Even further evidence gives further ramification of this feature. Two more verbs exist in Koine greek that unambiguously yield a meaning and usage specifying "immersion". First there is βυθίζω ("buthizo"). It is used just twice in the greek New Testament. In Luke 5:7 it means "to sink", referring to boats overloaded with people. In 1 Tim. 6:9 it is used in the sense "to drown". This verb is related to the greek noun βυθός ("buthos") meaning "the deep" (ref. to the sea.) Secondly, and most interestingly, is the compound verb καταποντίζω ("katapontizo"). This verb is used only twice in the greek New Testament. In Matt. 14:30 it is used to describe

⁴² Owen : WORKS (BOT edit. Edinburgh 1968) Vol. 16 pp. 266-268.

Peter suddenly beginning to sink down in the waters after walking upon the sea, and in Matt. 18:6 it is used when the Lord describes how it is better for those who offend His little ones to have a millstone hung around their necks, and for them to be cast into the sea. Now this usage of "katapontizo" is interesting because it indicates a complete immersion, such as the modern Baptist is want to predicate of "bapto" and "baptizo". Significantly, another salient usage of "katapontizo" is to be found in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation of Exodus 15:4 where it is used to describe what happened to Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea! NOW SIGNIFICANTLY AGAIN, the Apostle Paul in the New Testament takes up this whole business of the deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea, and calls it a "baptism". He writes :

"all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." (1 Cor. 10: vv. 1-2).

The verb used here for "baptized" is "baptizo". It is thus brought into close juxtaposition with the usage of the verb "katapontizo" in that the two verbs are apparently referring to the same event. If "immersion" is what the apostle wanted to specify he had a golden opportunity here to use a verb ("katapontizo") which was indubitably, and unambiguously, connected in the LXX account of the Red Sea crossing with the immersion of Pharaoh and his host. YET THE APOSTLE CAREFULLY AVOIDED USING "katapontizo" at this juncture. Why? For the following reasons:

(i) The "katapontizo" of LXX Exod. 15:4 refers to Pharaoh and his host, not to the Israelites.

(ii) The "baptizo" of 1 Cor. 10: vv. 1-2 refers to Israel or God's elect people.

(iii) From (i) and (ii) above one is forced to conclude that the "baptizo" of the Israelites did not involve their immersion, but that the "katapontizo" of the Egyptians most certainly did involve them in immersion. Hence there is a clear Scriptural difference between "baptizo" and "immersion".

The Scottish 'Relief' theologian, Neil Macmichael of about 200 years ago had an acidulous way of summing up this one. He put it like this:

1. The Israelites were baptised, both adults and infants; for the Apostle declares it.
2. They were not immersed, a fact which Moses and other inspired writers testify.
3. The Egyptians who pursued them were immersed.
4. The Israelites had baptism without immersion, and the Egyptians had immersion without baptism.
5. The baptism of the Israelites was salvation, and the immersion of the Egyptians drowning.⁴³

Linguistically, therefore, one is forced to conclude that "immersion" is a concept

⁴³. Cited by John MacLeod in: "*Scottish Theology*" (Edinburgh: BOT 1974) pages 253-254.

saliently, indeed, one might say, *carefully*, bypassed in the Scriptural delineations of "baptism". The sacred penmen, inspired immediately by the guiding impulses of the Heavenly Paraclete, carefully avoided using words that indubitably would have signified "dipping" or "immersion", and used instead words that were universally used to delineate "sprinklings" and "pourings". Such connection the verbs "bapto" and "baptizo" might have originally had with "dipping" and "immersing" they had manifestly lost diachronically via the natural linguistic processes of metonymy and specialised usage. They had come to signify "ceremonial purification" or "ceremonial washing" as a mode of initiation "into" something or somebody, and as such, if mode was expressed at all, in the Scriptural context of Christian baptisms and Old Testament baptisms, that mode was clearly "sprinkling" or "pouring".⁴⁴

Secondly, there is archaeological evidence that indicates that in the early centuries of the church, immersion was not initially the practice. It is apposite for us to investigate this evidence, as archaeology can track out for us the gradual introduction of immersion-capable baptisteries in the later centuries, plus **thirdly**, certain other powerful evidence in the form of Christian art-work, both monumental and as paintings.

Since the rise of the modern immersionistic movements, from the early 17th cent. onwards, archaeology has emerged and evolved into a sophisticated science. This is not to say that it is an infallible science. Nevertheless it is a highly useful tool. At the time of the early baptists, like Haweis, Knollys, Keach, and on into the times of Gill and Robinson in the 18th cent., our knowledge of the archaeology of ancient Christianity was next to nothing. Archaeology was barely emerging in the 18th century, and on through the 19th cent. such great baptists as Spurgeon predated the full expansion and development of the science.

Not to digress too far, it should yet be noted here that all these Baptist scholars predated, too, the rise of Linguistics as a scientific discipline. The development of this science has, in fact, vitiated much of the dictionary and lexicographical work that went in to producing the scholarly study aids for Scripture that were produced particularly in the 19th century and the early 20th cent. Such volumes include even prestigious lexicons like Winer, Cremer, Bengel, Grimm-Thayer, and even the grand phalanx of "Kittel". Much of such lexicographical work tended to support the "immersionist" view of baptism, but the application of proper linguistic principles of interpretation has in recent decades turned things upside down in important respects. The modern scientific view in fact supports the grammatico-historical-spiritual position of the Reformers and their usage of the "analogia fidei" as being

⁴⁴ Cf. the vast evidence accumulated in the 2000 plus pages of J.W. Dale Op. cit. The booklet by Michael Kimmitt is also a useful *vade mecum* in respect of these facts.

master keys of interpretation. The older lexicographical work is vitiated by its insistence on "etymology" as being the principal determinator of the meaning of any word.⁴⁵ It was on "etymology" that the early baptist scholars staked their all with respect to the meaning of those verbs "bapto" and "baptizo", and as modern linguistic science points out, those early baptists missed other equally important factors in the development of word-meanings such as "metonymy", "colloquial usage", "specialized usage", and the interactions of such factors with words, culture, and religion as those words tumble through the centuries of time.

In other words, the "immersionists" base their position, philologically, on outmoded, nay, erroneous concepts. The Reformers, and their subsequent heirs, though having to work with idiosyncratic study aids for some centuries,⁴⁶ were by contrast, more cautious, and their mode of interpreting words used in Scripture was, as it happens, more in line with the discoveries of modern linguistics than their immersionist protagonists.

But we come to the archaeology. Over the 20th century extensive exploration of ancient remains over Europe and the British Isles proceeded apace. Builders, developers, farmers, prospectors, engineers, anyone inadvertently unearthing ancient remains have now to report such to the authorities, and development work is halted until full archaeological investigations are undertaken. New techniques of discovering buried ancient remains via aerial, radar, and geo-magnetic surveys have all added to the encyclopaedic build-up of knowledge. Saliently, the remains of ancient Christian churches, some from nearly 1,900 years ago, have been brought to light. And in many of these church remains, the experts have isolated the remnants of baptisteries. And these remains are telling in their import against the immersionists.

It would take a volume of encyclopaedic dimensions to fully catalogue such discoveries. We content ourselves here, therefore, with a summary giving full references to the relevant scholarly works, noting as we go the conclusions of the historical and archaeological experts who have minutely examined the evidence.

By the later decades of the 20th cent. extensive cataloging and examination of ancient Church sites in Britain, across Europe, and the Near East, had been drafted by a plethora of experts. It was in 1981 that Batsford Academic published, in their series "Studies in Archaeology" the sterling work of Charles Thomas, Professor of

⁴⁵ Cf. **James Barr**: *"The Semantics of Biblical Language"* (Oxford Univ. Press 1961). One does not have to agree with Barr's virulent anti-Fundamentalist attitudes to appreciate his work as a linguistic expert, though it has to be said that perhaps he pushes things too far. There is still a lot of good mileage in those older lexicons, but it is necessary to bear in mind Barr's warnings when using them.

⁴⁶ **Hughes Oliphant Old**, (Op. Cit.) for instance, notes in footnote 70 on page 273 that the 10th cent. Byzantine lexicon used by the Reformers was seriously affected by the immersionistic predilections of the Greek churches from the 4th cent. on.

Archaeology at the University of Leicester 1967-1972, under the title : "Christianity in Roman Britain to AD. 500." In this scholarly tome the author is principally concerned with the archaeology of Christian sites in Roman Britain, but he necessarily views the subject by setting it in the context of the whole vista of discoveries dating from this time as extant from Europe and the Near East. Thomas sets aside a whole chapter of his work under the title: "Baptism and Baptisteries", and therein provides a succinct and useful summary of the evidence.

Thomas says: "In the mundane world of archaeological interpretation, we are obliged at any given site to try to decide which particular form of baptism may have been used: and, if possible, eventually to argue for the predominance of particular forms within given regions and provinces."⁴⁷

In undertaking this task, he notes that "submersion" can only be performed-apart from natural settings as in a river- in a receptacle of adequate dimensions. Analysing and summarising the vast catalogues of evidence, Thomas notes the numerous clues that point to "affusion" as being the standard mode, not "immersion", and this, despite the fact that literary evidence from ancient documents alludes to the sacrament as an act of "submersion". Thomas notes that as far back as 1903 the scholar C.F.Rogers had noted this peculiar phenomena, that whilst documentary evidence continuously alluded to immersionism, yet the extant archaeological evidence forced him to conclude that immersion "had in fact been rare, and hardly ever followed."⁴⁸

Thomas also cites the French scholar, Khatchatrian, who in his scholarly tome of 1962 produced a fulsome catalogue of the archaeological remains apposite to baptism.⁴⁹ He notes that another scholar, J. G. Davies, on examining Khatchatrian's evidence,⁵⁰ draws the conclusion that in "early churches in Greece, to name only one area, " there "does not exist a single baptistery of which the font was deep enough to allow the submersion of the candidate". Moreover, this feature proves to be true, says Thomas, of sites excavated in "Syria, Palestine, Egypt and North Africa, and of the very few sites in France now supportable as being really early."⁵¹

Thomas concludes: ".....total submersion was **not** the common practice. Affusion

⁴⁷ Thomas: Op. cit. page 205.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 206 citing C.F. Rogers: "*Baptism and Christian Archaeology*" in *STUDIA BIBLICA ET PATRISTICA* 5 (Oxford) pp. 239-362.

⁴⁹ Ibid. page 206 citing A. Khatchatrian: "*Les baptistères paléochrétiens: plans, notices et bibliographie*" (Paris 1962).

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 206 citing J.G. Davies: "*The Archeological Setting of Baptism*" (London 1962) pp 23-26.

⁵¹ Ibid p. 206 ref. to work of Davies, Mâle: "*La Fin du Paganisme en Gaule*" (Paris 1950), chap. 8; and Porcher and Volbach: "*Europe in the Dark Ages*" pp.294-307 (Engl. transl.of French 1967 orig.).

seems to have been by far the most likely mode of Baptism, in Britain, as in Gaul".⁵² (*Emph. Ed.*)

Arising from this, we note the following salient features:

1) Archaeological evidence from the first 5 centuries of Christianity from all across Europe, the Near East, and North Africa universally points away from immersionism to affusion, this latter of which can also be interpreted as "sprinkling".⁵³

2) The fact that ancient British church evidence points again to "affusion" is specially significant. The ancient Celtic churches of Britain came into being very early on, perhaps as early as mid to late 2nd cent. and remained free and aloof from the later development of the Papacy.⁵⁴ It was not in fact, until as late as 597 AD that the Papal church first set its foot in Britain, and assimilating the invading Saxons in the east, aided and abetted war and genocide against the competing Celtic churches in the west and far north. Wholesale terror was let loose on the Celtic Christians, as their churches were, of course, connected in a kind of "Apostolic succession" right back to the Apostles without any Papal intermediary connection. At those times then Rome would have had to assimilate the Celtic churches, or surrender the right to "sole Apostolic succession". The result of their pogroms was the gradual wearing down of the Celts, until the ancient Celtic churches were assimilated into Romanism at the Synod of Whitby in 664 AD.

Thus Romanist-style practices were at minimal levels in the British churches prior to 664 AD. We should expect to find amongst them, therefore, a purer doctrine of baptism, and a more pristine mode of its application. This the archaeological evidence supplies. Now this is important, because it runs counter to what the Immersionist lobby would lead us to expect. If immersionism is the most ancient practice, then we should expect to find evidence of it amongst the ancient Celtic churches, whereas the non-immersion-capable fonts would be wholly found in those areas first affected by the Papacy in Europe. What is extant however is that the evidence from early fonts indicates that immersionism was *not* extant as the common mode of baptism not only in Celtic Britain, but also right across the rest of the

⁵² Ibid. p. 213.

⁵³ From the archaeological evidence in terms of ancient baptisteries, one cannot tell whether sprinkling or affusion was the mode. What one can tell is that it was not immersion. Also, in Biblical terms ceremonial baptisms or washings were often "sprinklings", as per Heb. 9:10 and following. Hence affusion and sprinkling as ecclesiastical modes of baptism are fundamentally at one, the only difference being possibly the quantity of water applied.

⁵⁴ On these ancient Celtic churches and their origins note **Arthur Wade-Evans**: "*Welsh Christian Origins*" (Alden Press, Oxford 1934).

Christian world.⁵⁵ But this leaves us with the enigma that documentary evidence from these ancient times speaks of "immersionism" as the mode of baptism. Why does the literary evidence contradict the archaeological? It is necessary now to examine this carefully, and what we find is surprising.

Thirdly: Linguistic evidence versus Archaeology.

In a learned essay first published in 1896, the Presbyterian scholar B.B. Warfield⁵⁶ expatiated somewhat on the contradiction evident betwixt the ancient documentary references to baptism as being immersion, and the actual archaeological data that was already by then beginning to have a notable impact. Warfield noted that whilst the archaeological remains shouted that affusion was the universal mode of practice in the early church and in most areas for most of the first millennium, yet in the theological and literary references extant from many of the early Church Fathers and the later medieval theologians baptism is repeatedly described as a "trine (three-fold) immersion". Warfield enquires thence at length as to (i) whether these references to trine immersion reflect apostolic practice, or an ecclesiastical development, and (ii) whether immersion was insisted on as the only valid mode of baptism.

Begining with (ii) above, Warfield adumbrates a concatenation of evidences that illustrate how at no time from the Apostolic period to the medieval period, was there ever a time when aspersion or sprinkling was considered to be invalid as to mode. He cites evidences from the "didache" of the late 1st/early 2nd cent. through Cyprian (3rd Cent.), Augustine, on through the witnesses of the Egyptian Coptic churches, the Syrian churches, including the 7th Cent. James of Edessa and Mar Basilus, the Council of Toledo in 633, the Council of Worms in 868, on through to the medieval giants like St. Thomas and Bonaventura. Universally, aspersion was regarded as an acceptable mode of baptism, and this feature is trackable right back to the "didache".

With respect to (i) above, Warfield discovered that "with whatever stringency trine immersion may have been held the right and only regular mode of baptism, it is perfectly obvious that other modes were not considered invalid and no baptism."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ **Thomas:** op. cit. pages 213 - 227 gives the examples of ancient Celtic baptism fonts found in Britain. They are exclusively non-immersionistic.

⁵⁶ **Warfield:** "*The Archaeology of the Mode of Baptism*" published in the BIBLIOTHECA SACRA Vol. liii for 1896 and pages 601-644. This essay can also be accessed in the collection of Warfield's lesser known works printed under the title: "*Studies in Theology*" (Edinburgh BOT 1988) and pages 345 to 386. All references to this work of Warfield hereinafter follow the BOT pagination.

⁵⁷ **Warfield** Op. cit . p. 358

We see two traditions therefore running parallel in the ancient churches, trine immersion, and aspersion or sprinkling. In theological circles, the trine immersion was held as the normal mode, this we adduce as being under the effect of the incoming paganism of the Roman mystery religions. But now Warfield can refer us to a strange phenomena. Why, he asks, if theologically so much emphasis began to be put on trine immersion, increasingly as one tracks onward through the Middle Ages, why do all monumental and artistic representations of baptism in the early centuries universally illustrate "affusion" ? We can add, today, the question: Why are all extant fonts or baptisteries from those ancient times not deep enough to effect immersion?

"It is most noteworthy" says Warfield, "that from the second to the ninth century there is found scarcely one pictorial representation of baptism by immersion; but the suggestion is almost uniformly either sprinkling or pouring." ⁵⁸ Indeed, it seems that one has to come as late as the 9th cent. before one finds pictorial representations that suggest immersion, and even there such evidence is sparse.⁵⁹ From the Christian art of the catacombs of ancient Rome through to the medieval period, archaeology has revealed that pictorial representations of baptism as aspersion/sprinkling are universal in the earlier centuries, and only in the later (mainly 9th cent.) are immersionistic pictorial evidences emergent.

So how, asks Warfield do we explain the theological and literary emphasis on "trine immersion"?

In answering this, Warfield draws attention to the Patristic usage of "immersion", and to the representations of Christian baptism in the artwork recovered from ancient Christian archaeological sites.⁶⁰

With respect to the Christian art, Hughes Oliphant Old notes that in Classical Art, any human ritual or act was always portrayed by means of "freezing" in the picture what one might call the "definitive point of the action". Such stylistic "freezing" proved to be enduringly conservative, and not given to changes even if in society and culture changes did evolve with respect to what the art-form was depicting.⁶¹ Warfield notes this feature, though not so explicitly as Old, and does not really see its full significance. In order to appreciate this feature of "definitive-moment-

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p. 361. In Footnote 43 Warfield cites Bennett's *"Christian Archaeology"* of 1890 noting that the Christian art data from the early Roman catacombs is exclusively in favour of affusion.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 361 and footnote 44 where Warfield cites an example of immersion found in a "Pontifical" of the 9th cent. recorded in Smith and Cheetham's *"A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities."*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 361-370.

⁶¹ Old, *op. cit.* p.271, where he says: "Once a tradition (had) been established as to how a particular subject should be represented, it never changed." Cf. also Warfield *op. cit.* p. 368.

freezing" we might allude, even today, to a modern artist or photographer. Such a professional will, in seeking to portray definitively in one picture the very essence of his subject seek to "freeze" the definitive moment of say, the crown being placed on the young Elizabeth's head in 1953 as depicting the Coronation. Likewise, ancient artists depicting baptism, picked out the "definitive moment". Universally they depicted a presbyter pouring or sprinkling water over a neophyte, the latter standing in a shallow baptistery, or font.

Everywhere, baptism was represented as aspersion/sprinkling. "When," says Warfield, "when Jerome and Leo and Pelagius and Gregory were speaking of trine immersion as of order in Rome, the artists were still laying stress on affusion." (or sprinkling).⁶²

Indeed, so entrenched was the artistic fixation with affusion/sprinkling, that one classical archaeological example from AD 450 provides a startling view of what was actually going on. By AD 450 the immersionism imported from the mystery cults was of course gaining ground steadily, and in the Baptistery of the Orthodox at Ravenna there is a ceiling mosaic of a picture of John the Baptist baptising Jesus. Underneath this picture, is the baptistery. Saliently, it is a baptistery that deep that it shouts at us that it was used for immersion, and is one of the earliest of such on record., a rare example indeed from that era. But amazingly, the picture above it shows John baptising Jesus by affusion/sprinkling.⁶³ Thus as each neophyte was laid back into the water of the baptistery below, each would have looked straight up at a picture of Christ being baptized by affusion/sprinkling !

In trying to make sense of such conflicting evidence, Warfield suggests that the Patristic usage of the term "immersion" was such that they interpreted baptism as "immersion" even when undertaken by "pouring" or aspersion. Pouring does mean, indeed that an "immersion" of a kind does take place.⁶⁴ However, Warfield's solution here does not do justice to the fact that some of the fathers speak of "plunging" in baptism, and we have seen that from the late 4th cent on for the first time baptism was associated as to mode with Rom. 6:4/Col.2:12.

The answer lies in the fact that the impact of assimilated paganism from the mystery religions was having a greater and greater bearing on Christian theology. The very design of many of the earliest fonts betrays the impact of pagan mystery religion, with the *octagonal* shape reflecting the octagonal plunge baths through which pagan initiates were baptised in the heathen cults.⁶⁵ Only of course, the Christian

⁶² Warfield: op.cit. p.369.

⁶³ Old: op. cit.. pp. 271-272.

⁶⁴ Warfield op. cit. pp. 369 ff.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 374 Warfield notes that various scholars of his time detected this copying of pagan baptisteries, and says: "Having obtained their models of the baptistery from the surrounding heathendom, it may possibly be that the early Christians the more readily leaned toward completing their symbolical bath by pouring....."

font was not so deep, initially, that is. As time went on the influence of the pagan input began to evolve the simple font into a full-blown immersionist's baptistery, and the example from Ravenna is one of the earliest. This incoming pagan "immersionism" had to meet, however, the conservative traditions of the Churches extant from the Apostolic times. The history of the rise of the Papacy shows indubitably that the paganisation process was a gradual evolution that did not reach its zenith until the time of the Reformation, when God broke down the bastions of Antichrist. We should expect to find, therefore, that the archaeological evidence in terms of baptisteries and monumental art would reflect this process, as such evidences do in all cultural environments. And this is indubitably what we find. All early literary references to baptism describe affusion/sprinkling as a valid mode, and even those later references which specify "plunge" baptisms still allow that "affusion/sprinkling" is yet a valid mode, and the archaeological data from baptisteries and from ancient Christian art indicates for us that affusion/sprinkling was the entrenched orthodoxy right from the early times. The influx of immersionism was later, and initially struggled against the entrenched old orthodox mode of administering the sacrament. Immersion-capable baptisteries are Johnny-come-latelies on the scene.

If the Baptist immersionistic cause was the correct one, we should see, archaeologically and historically, the exact opposite to the evidence presented above, with deep baptisteries in the early period, with universal artwork depicting neophytes being "plunged" under the water as the "definitive moment" of baptism, then as the centuries pass, we should expect to see the gradual introduction of shallow baptisteries or fonts being introduced as a "Romanist" aberration, and a gradual evolution of the artistic representations of baptism moving away from plunge-baths and very slowly and reluctantly turning over to illustrate affusion/sprinkling. Indeed, if the Baptist argument was right, the baptistery at Ravenna ought to have been one of the first baptisteries to be too shallow for immersion, and the mosaic on the ceiling ought to have depicted John plunging the Lord Christ under the Jordan waters. And this because if immersionism was Apostolic, then immersionism would have affected the design of the earliest baptisteries, and immersion would have been the "definitive moment" frozen into the tradition of the early Christian art.

If all this says anything, it shouts this: That early baptism was universally affusion/sprinkling, and immersionism was a later and pagan interloper infused into Christianity from perhaps the late 2nd cent. onwards. This was truly the Romanist aberration gathering apace to become established as the prime (but not exclusive) mode of baptism by the early medieval period. The exegetical connection first made between baptism and Rom. 6:4/Col. 2:12 in the late fourth century provided an extra impetus to this evolution from thereon, subsequent to the "establishment" of Christianity (?) as the state religion of the pagan (!) Roman empire. Indeed, it was a deeply paganised travesty of the Biblical faith once delivered unto the Saints.

Scripture, Linguistics, and Archaeological/Historical studies. A three-fold cord is not quickly broken.....(Eccles. 4:12).

To be continued (DV).....