

# The Baptismal Covenant: A Theological Reflection

*By Anand Peter*

The subject under discussion is unquestionably one of high impact, touching upon the very nature of our entrance into the Christian life. Upon reviewing the contributions of our learned members, one perceives various perspectives, yet fundamentally, all appear to be largely in synchronisation. Nevertheless, the necessity remains to arrive at a definitive consensus. Armed with the chain of reasoned discussions, I shall now endeavour to harmonise the thoughts so eloquently expressed. I set forth these reflections, trusting they may be received for their intrinsic merit.

## The Foundational Scriptural Roadmap

The very subject of Christian Baptism necessitates an intense and diligent study of the Gospel Accounts, the Acts of the Apostles, and the ensuing Epistles. The authoritative roadmap for New Covenant practice is clearly laid out in these foundational writings. I submit that little of substance can be gleaned or extrapolated directly from the Old Testament practices, as the New Testament introduces a radical transformation—the ultimate fulfilment in Christ.

The presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple, as described in the Gospel of Luke, was a ceremony rooted in the Law—a presentation, dedication, and act of purification (Luke 2:22-38). On that occasion, the focus included the purification of Mary and a prophetic declaration of Jesus' Messianic identity through Simeon and Anna. In no respect, structurally or theologically, can this event be conflated with the Sacrament of Baptism. The contention that this was a presentation of Jesus in the Temple, fulfilling Old Covenant obligations, holds absolutely true.

Going forward, the Lord Jesus Christ underwent Baptism in the River Jordan, an event marked by the Trinitarian affirmation of God the Father's voice and the visible descent of God the Holy Spirit. This momentous occasion, administered by John the Baptist, preceded the commencement of His earthly ministry. This was an unrepeatable act of identification with sinful humanity, demonstrating the means by which He would fulfil all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). There is, therefore, no scriptural warrant for a second Baptism here.

## The Internal Reality of Regeneration

In our Church of North India tradition, the practice of infant Baptism is permitted. I contend that, for the child, this ritual carries no salvific meaning whatsoever. The child does not technically experience the Baptism of the Spirit. Instead, a solemn opportunity is offered to the parents, guardians, and the wider covenant community to make a public commitment regarding the child's spiritual nurture and future Christian upbringing.

Considering the profound theological fact that true Baptism is not ritualistic, but the outward sign of an inward grace—a genuine change of heart marked by repentance for all sins and a conscious acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour, leading to a turning of a new leaf—I believe that infant

Baptism, in its initial form, is theologically void of personal efficacy. If such an individual, upon reaching an age of accountability, makes a public profession of faith and undergoes a true, believer's Baptism, this should not be considered a second Baptism. In this scenario, the rite of Confirmation is effectively telescoped into the Baptismal act, rendering both a single, cohesive occurrence of personal commitment and grace.

## **The Ongoing Work of the Spirit**

I am further of the view that, from a sacramental perspective, the Baptismal event is a public declaration of justification (being made right with God), but the true, spiritual occurrence is fundamentally internal. The elements of sin, or indwelling iniquity, are not fully wiped out in a single moment, as they return time and again in various forms throughout a life dedicated to Christ.

Therefore, the inner Baptism by the Spirit—the process of sanctification—should, by necessity, happen time and again, numerous times, in a lifetime, should one be genuinely committed to leading a life reflecting Jesus Christ. The arguments for and against a second Baptism become theologically infructuous when understood through the lens of ongoing spiritual renewal. This is precisely where we have the immense advantage of the indwelling Paraclete, God the Holy Spirit, who works continuously within us. It is not about more water and the outward forms, but an enduring, inward transformation wrought by the Spirit.

I offer these thoughts not as a doctrinal mandate, but as a point for further consideration. I recall making a similar statement during a Lenten Study, where the majority, with the notable exception of the late Bishop Santram, found the conceptualisation to be not very acceptable.