

# **B A B Y   B E L I E F   B E F O R E   B A P T I S M**

**BIRTH AFTER REBIRTH: ON THE FAITH OF PRENATAL COVENANTERS  
ALIAS THE SEED OF FAITH IN COVENANT INFANTS BEFORE THEY ARE BAPTIZED**

Doctoral dissertation  
(approximately 200,000 words)  
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of

***Doctor in Religious Education (D.R.E.)*** at  
Dominion School of Education, U.S.A.

by

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Brisbane Australia 1991

Second and revised edition 2002



Incipiently  
blessed  
before  
baptism

Ingraftingly  
blessed  
during  
baptism

Increasingly  
blessed  
after  
baptism

## FOREWORD

On perusing this treatise, one is once again impressed by the humble and unquestioning acceptance of the Word of God by the author. Yet he does not succumb to the fallacy of Biblicism. For he never pretends to have been the first to prove the real sense and significance of biblical truth.

Professor Lee merely seeks to follow in the steps of the Master and of many predecessors who have been instructed by the *Doctor ecclesiae*. Standing on their shoulders and thoroughly conversant with the recognised confessions of faith, he could envisage divine revelation in a meticulous and lucid manner.

According to him -- and rightly so -- the covenant of grace is the mainstay of infant baptism. The flaw that vitiates adult baptism even within the covenant of grace, is the urge of depraved man to contribute meritoriously to the act of grace. This is indeed tantamount to detracting from grace.

A *locus classicus* as regards infant baptism and the validity and cogency of presumed regeneration, is contained in the words of the apostle Paul to the Romans as stated in ch. 4:11 -- which are seldom noted. This did, however, not escape the attention of Calvin and of our author.

Referring to the said text, Calvin terms circumcision "a seal of the righteousness of faith." He then argues "that since God imparted circumcision, the sign of repentance and faith, to infants -- it should not seem absurd that they are now made partakers of baptism, unless men choose to clamour against an institution of God.... Children are baptized for future repentance and faith.... The seed of both lies hid in them, by the secret operation of the Spirit." *Institutes* IV:16:20.

May this study by Rev. Professor Dr. Francis Nigel Lee then enjoy the readership it deserves!

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"You made me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts....  
You are my God, from my mother's womb." Psalm 22

"Before I [the Lord] formed you in the belly, I knew you;  
and before you came forth out of the womb, I sanctified you!" Jeremiah 1

"Sanctify the congregation; those that suck the breasts....  
He will cause the rain to come down for you!" Joel 2

"He [John] shall be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb....  
"The sixth month, the babe leaped in my womb for joy." Luke 1

"I [Jesus] thank You because You have revealed these things to babies....  
Be converted like these little ones who believe in Me!" Matthew 11 & 18

"They brought to Him [Jesus] infants, so that He could touch them....  
"Whosoever receives not the Kingdom like a child, enters not!" Luke 18

"Jesus said to them [the priests and scribes], Have you never read:  
'Out of the mouth of sucklings, You have perfected praise?'" Matthew 21

"I will pour out of My Spirit.... Repent and be baptized....  
For the promise is to you and to your children." Acts 2

"Rebecca conceived...the unborn children.... It was said...by God:  
'Jacob have I loved.... I will have mercy on whom I want.'" Romans 9

"The unbelieving husband has been set apart by the [believing] wife....  
Else were your children unclean; but now, they are holy." I Corinthians 7

"Faith dwelt first in your grandmother and your mother, and in you....  
From infancy, you have salvation through faith in Christ." II Timothy 1 & 3

"We baptize our children. For it would be unfair to rob those born from us as the people of God, of fellowship.... They are those whom one should presume have been elected by God."  
-- *First Swiss Confession* art. 21f (1536).

"We with our children...cannot enter into the Kingdom of God except we be born again.... Although our children have been conceived and born in sin..., they nevertheless have also been sanctified in Christ and therefore ought to be baptized as members of His Church.... You have forgiven us and our children all our sins...and received us through Your Holy Spirit...and so have adopted us to be Your children and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism."  
-- *Dutch Reformed Baptismal Formula* (1581).

"The children of believers are holy...by virtue of the covenant of grace in which they together with the parents are comprehended. Godly parents have no reason to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy."  
-- *Decrees of the International Calvinist Synod of Dordt* I:17 (1618).

"The seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the Church, have by their birth, interest in the covenant and right to the seal of it.... Children by baptism are solemnly received into the bosom of the Visible Church.... They are Christians and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized."  
-- *Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God* (1645).

"Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit Who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth."  
-- *Westminster Confession of Faith* X:3 (1647).

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## SYNOPSIS

My former friend Rev. Dr. Gary Roper (then of Memphis Baptist Tabernacle) once told me no baby could believe in Jesus. Consequently, concluded Dr. Roper, all early-dying babies -- even those of Christian parentage -- should be regarded as lost.

Another acquaintance, the Baptist David Kingdon, informed me we cannot but be 'agnostic' about such matters. See his well-known book *Children of Abraham*.

Well, can babies believe in Jesus? Until born again, no person at all even sees the Kingdom of God (John 3:3-8). The inspired writer of Christ's Epistle to the Hebrews (11:6) insists "without faith it is impossible to please God."

In chapter I, we look at the teaching of Scripture anent the **baby belief of tiny covenanters**. Do they trust in Jesus even before their birth; because baptized; or only after their infant baptism?

In chapter II, we examine the teaching of **baby belief in the Ante-Nicene Church**. Did the Early Church Fathers teach that covenant infants were to be baptized? Did they assume their prenatal regeneratedness?

In chapter III, we take a look at **baby belief from Nicea to the Reformation**. When did the doctrine of baptismal regenerationism first take root? Was baptism always regarded as essential for salvation -- ere the epoch-making 'Copernican revolution' of Zwingli?

In chapter IV, we examine the views of **Calvin on baby belief before baptism**. What did he say about the presumed regeneratedness of covenant infants prenatally? Did he regard them as needing baptism after their birth? What did he think of baptismal regenerationism?

In chapter V, we note perceptions about **baby belief from Knox till Westminster**. What is the teaching of the Reformed Creeds, from the *Scots Confession* to the *Decrees of Dordt*? What does the *Westminster Confession* (10:3) mean anent "elect infants dying in infancy" being "regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit?" Why does the *Westminster Directory* state "the seed...of the faithful...are Christians...before baptism?"

In chapter VI, we trace the development of the doctrine of **belief within babies from the Westminster Assembly till 1991**. How was this matter viewed by English Puritans like Manton and Owen? How have Calvinists elsewhere (and notably in Scotland and in Holland) seen this matter? What did the Early American Presbyterians believe about this? And what are the opinions hereanent of leading Reformed theologians worldwide, during the last fifty years?

In chapter VII, we draw our **Conclusion -- Christianity's baby belief before baptism!** Even infants need regeneration, in order to be justified. God clearly regenerates all early-dying infants of the godly. Thus the latter babies should all be baptized, by sprinkling, in infancy -- as those themselves presumed to be believers.

## **ORDER OF SOURCES DISCUSSED IN LEE'S "BABY BELIEF BEFORE BAPTISM"**

Holy Scripture (Genesis to Revelation).

The Talmud (Aboth, Baba Kamma, Baba Meezia, Baruch, Chaggim, Cheriroth, Chethboth, Chizzuk Emunah, Erubim, Genesis Rabba, Hullim, Javamoth, Jeramoth, Makshirin, Menahoth, Niddah, Perah, Pesach, Qiddush, Rosh ha-Shanah, Sanhedrin, Shabbath, Tohoroth, Yebamoth, Yoma).

Old Testament Apocrypha (Sirach *etc.*) and Pseudepigrapha (Testament of Levi *etc.*). Tannaim, Hillel & Shammai, Qumran, Essenes. Greeks & Romans (Homer, Euripides, Virgil, Ovid, Plutarch, Apuleius). John the Baptizer. Philo, Josephus, Judaism (according to the Mishna, Aben Ezra, Serira Gaon, Nizzachon, Jehuda Ben-Levi, Meor Enajim, Abraham Ben-David, Rabbi Minchas, R. Solomon, R. Joseph, Abravanel, Maimonides, Selden, Modena, Witsius, Jeremias and Aland).

Clement of Rome. Didache. Epistle of Barnabas. Ignatius. Pliny. Aristides. Epistle to Diognetus. Papias. Shepherd of Hermas. The New Testament Apocrypha (Acts of Paul, Acts of Paul and Thecla, Acts of Peter, Acts of Xanthippe & Polyxena, Words of Baruch, & Gospel of Thomas). Justin Martyr. Polycarp. Hierax. Papyrus. Maximus. Irenaeus of Sirmium. Sabas.

Marcion and the Marcionites. Montanus and the Montanists. Athenagoras. Theodotus. Irenaeus of Lyons. Polycrates. Clement of Alexandria. The Old Egyptian Ordinance. Archeological evidences. Tertullian. Hippolytus. Minucius Felix. Origen. Cyprian. Dionysius of Alexandria. Baptismal inscriptions for infants. The Hieracitae. Eusebius of Caesarea. Lactantius. The 306 A.D. Synod of Elvira. The 316 Synod of Neocaesarea. Asterius.

The 325 Council of Nicea. Alexander of Alexandria. Asterius. Arabic Canons. Athanasius. Zeno of Verona. Optatus of Milevus. Cyril of Jerusalem. Basil the Great. Gregory of Nazianzen. Gregory of Nyssa. The 'Apostolic' Liturgy. The apocryphal Apocalypse of Peter. The apocryphal Vision of Paul. Siricius. Didymus the Blind. Ambrose. Chrysostom. The Donatists. The 397 A.D. Synod of Carthage. The Sixth Synod of Carthage. Jerome.

Epiphanius. Augustine. Pelagius. Caelestius. The Pelagians. The Semi-Pelagians. Innocent. The African Code. The 'Apostolic' Constitutions and other Pseudepigrapha (Pseudo-Dionysius, Pseudo-Clement, Pseudo-Justin, Pseudo-Athanasius, Pseudo-Chrysostom). Philastrius. Theodoret. Isidore of Pelusium. Leo. Deacon Mark. Cyril of Alexandria. Gregory the Great.

The Mediaeval Church. Old Gotho-Gallican Collect. John of Damascus. Liturgy of the Greek Church. Ancient 'Orthodox' Church of Armenia. Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Churches. Theophylact of Bulgaria. The Paulicians and the Petrobrusians. The Bogomils or Cathari. The Albigensians.

The Waldensians. Alain de Lille. Bernard. Thomas Aquinas. Bonaventura. The 1284 Council of Nemours. The 1304 Synod of Langres. Dante Alighieri. Later Romanism (The Council of Florence, Durand, Gerson, Cassender, Bianchi, Bellarmin, Petavius, Gregory Ariminensis,

Sfondrati, Pope Pius IV, Malebranche, Pope Pius IX, Cardinal Newman, Gousset, J.P. Murphy, B.V. Miller, D.A. Vonier).

Wycliffe. The Lollards. Huss. Calixtines. The Taborites. Bohemian Brethren. Luther. Melancthon. The Augsburg Confession. Gnesianism. Westphal. Heshusius. Chemnitz. The Formula of Concord. Hunnius. The Saxon Visitation Articles. The later Lutherans (Hoffmann, Chemnitz, Gerhard, Delitzsch, Krauth, Pieper). The Anabaptists (Münzer, Storch, Ulimann, Blaurock, Manz, Hübmaier, Simons & Philips). Zwingli. Bucer. Capito. Hedio. The Tetrapolitan Confession. Musculus.

Oecolampadius. The First Basel Confession. Myconius. First Bohemian Confession. Bullinger. Megander. Leo Judae. The Second Basel Confession alias the First Helvetic Confession. Peter Martyr Vermigli. George Wishart. Aretius. Cajetan. The Council of Trent. Laski. Micron. Cranmer. Ridley. Crumwell. The English Confession of Faith alias the Forty-two Edwardine Articles. Hooper. Philpot. Becon. The Church of England's Thirty-nine Articles. R. Hooker. J.H. Blunt. The Hungarian Reformed Confession. The Consensus Tigurinus.

Calvin (vs. Castellio, Servetus & Socinus). Beza. Knox. The First Scots Confession. The First Book of Discipline. The 1565 General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland. Guido de Brés. The Belgic Confession. Ursinus. Olevianus. The Heidelberg Catechism. The Profession of the Tridentine Faith. The Roman Catechism from the Decrees of Trent. The Second Helvetic Confession.

Zanchius. Datheen. Craig. The Scots Catechism. The 1580 Second Scots Confession (alias the National Covenant). Menzo Alting. Friedrich Spanheim Jr. Vander Heyden. The Dutch Reformed Baptismal Formula. The Synopsis of Purer Theology. Taffin. Junius. Keckermann. The Brandenburg Confessions (The Confession of Sigismund the Leipzig Colloquy, and the Declaration of Thorn). Lucas Trelcatius Sr. Lucas Trelcatius Jr. Snecanus. Kimedoncius. Bastingius.

Gomarus. The Arminians (Limborch, Curcellaeus & Episcopius). Acronius. Grevinchoven. Seu. Bontemps. Du Bois. Donselaer. Austro-Sylvius. Moded. Buschius. Tay. Costerus. Nicolai. Lanspergius. Amspringius. Vossenholius. Faukelius. The Short Compendium (of the Heidelberg Catechism).

Cartwright. Whitaker. Preston. Perkins. Ames. Ball. The Synod of South Holland's Formula for Baptizing Adults. Gallus. Donteclock. Bucanus. Puppius. Hommius. Alsted. Henry Alting. The Irish Articles. Lubbertus. Maccovius. The Decrees of Dordt (including its Preamble, its Postscript, and the Addenda of the theologians from Switzerland and Bremen). Walaeus. Rivetus.

Voetius. Cloppenburgh. Udeman. Kuchlin. Geselius. Boerhave. P. De Witte. Burmannus. Polanus. Maresius. Vossius. Wollebius. Nigrinus. Berg. James Alting. Trigland. Smyth. Helwys. Sibbes. Shepard. Cotton. Hooker. Davenport. Williams.

Burgess. Gillespie. Lightfoot. Marshall. Reynolds. Rutherford. Twisse. Ussher. Wallis. The Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God. The Westminster Confession of Faith. The Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechism.



Manton. Dickson. Trapp. Baxter. Love. Brooks. Guthrie. Owen. Wigglesworth. Poudrouyen. Cocceius. Wendelin. Lodensteyn. Flavel. Witsius. Watson. John Edwards. Heidegger. Turretine. The Formula Consensus Helvetica. Ridderus. Koelman. Vitranga. Smytegelt. Brakel. William Wall. Matthew Henry. Watts. Steuart. Venema. Maastricht. Marck. Willison. Vander Honert. De Moor. Melchior Leydekker. Jacob Leydekker. Groenewegen. Van Toll. Tuinman. Aemilius.

The Cambridge Agreement. Winthrop. The Cambridge Platform. Richard Mather. Increase Mather. Cotton Mather. The Adopting Act of 1729. The 'Great Awakening.' Jedidiah Andrews. Jonathan Edwards Sr. Doddridge. Boston. Erskine. Shaw. John Brown of Haddington.

Wesley. Toplady. Newton. The French Revolution. Beecher. The 1801 Union of U.S. Congregationalists & Presbyterians. S.J. Baird. T. Scott. A.S. Paterson. W. Harris. J.H. Bockok. J. Dick. The 'Great Disruption.' Buchanan. D. Russell. G.W. Bethune. De Cock. Groen van Prinsterer. J. de Liefde. H.P. Scholte. Wormser Sr.

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