

ARE ALL WHO DIE IN INFANCY SAVED?

Introduction

The issue of what happens to those who die in infancy can be emotional. Dealing with infants can be like dealing with fire or sticks of dynamite; all ought to be handled with tenderness and the utmost of care. A verse of the Scottish poet, and anti-Calvinist, Robert Burns' satirical poem about a so-called Calvinist he calls *Holy Willie* quickly springs to mind and strikes a piercing but painful note in the ears and hearts of those born of the Spirit. The poem is called *Holy Willie's Prayer*:

When frae my mither's womb I fell,
Thou might hae plungèd me in hell,
To gnash my gums, to weep and wail,
In burnin' lakes,
Where damnèd devils roar and yell,
Chain'd to their stakes...

Do Calvinists really believe that any dying infants go to Hell? Surely all Christians who have suffered the loss of an infant or a little child believe that the Bible gives ample comfort that they will see them again in glory. The 1619 Canons of Dort in Article 1:17 sums up what Calvinists believe regarding their own children who die in infancy:

Since we are to judge the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with the parents are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.

Holy Willie is William Fisher (1737-1809). He was an elder in the Mauchline Kirk Session. His body lies buried in Ochiltree cemetery. Therefore he was not just some windmill in Burns' mind that he tilted at because of what he perceived to be Fisher's hypocrisy. It would seem (at least according to the words Burns put in his mouth) that Fisher disagreed with Article 1:17 quoted above.

Fisher is not alone, for some still hold that there have been infants who have died and gone to Hell. Not only that, they add contempt to their objection to the Calvinist view, by alleging that it promotes infanticide! Their reasoning is that it promotes the idea that parents can ensure their children's election and salvation simply by murdering them or having someone else do it! But, if Article 1:17 of the Canons of Dort is a true statement of Scriptural doctrine, then those who object to it stand in danger of accusing God of promoting the murder of infants, including abortion!

The onus of proof on those who believe that there have been any who have died in infancy and gone to Hell, is to demonstrate their doctrine from Scripture. But know that no Reformed Confession states this contrary position. Even though it is the sovereign Almighty God who holds our breath in His hand, even though it is He who gives us length of days, all murderers, including all abortionists, are held accountable to God for their actions. Hell is a real place awaiting such unrepentant sinners.

We believe therefore that Christians whose children die in infancy have no reason to doubt that their children are with the Lord awaiting them. But does the Bible provide any hope for infants dying outside of the covenant community of God? We believe that the Bible gives probable hope that all who die in infancy are saved, and if so, are saved by the grace of God alone.

RC Sproul

The American theologian RC Sproul in his book "Now That's A Good Question" gives a brief answer to the question: *What happens to children who die before they can accept the gospel?*

In my own theological tradition, we believe that those children who die in infancy are numbered among the redeemed. That is to say, we hope and have a certain level of confidence that God will be particularly gracious toward those who have never had the opportunity to be exposed to the gospel, such as infants or children who are too disabled to hear and understand.

The New Testament does not teach us this explicitly. It does tell us a lot about the character of God – about His mercy and grace – and gives us every reason to have that kind of confidence in His dealings with children. Some will make a distinction between infants in general and those who are children of believers, the reason being that when God made a covenant with Abraham, He made it not only with Abraham, but with Abraham’s descendants. In fact, as soon as God entered into that relationship with Abraham, He brought Isaac into it – when Isaac was still an infant and didn’t have an understanding of what was going on. This is the reason, incidentally, that a large number of Christian bodies practice the baptism of infants; they believe that children of believers are to be incorporated into full membership in the church. We see this relationship within the family in biblical history.

We also see David’s situation in the Old Testament when his infant dies. Yet David is given the confidence that he will see that child again in heaven. That story of David and his dying child gives tremendous consolation to parents who have lost infants to death.

Now the point that we have to make is that infants who die are given a special dispensation of the grace of God; it is not by their innocence but by God’s grace that they are received into heaven. There are great controversies that hover over the doctrine of original sin. Lutherans disagree in turn with Presbyterians, etc., on the scope and extent of what we call original sin. Original sin does not refer to the first sin committed, but rather to the result of that – the entrance of sin into the world so that all of us as human beings are born in a fallen state. We come into this world with a sin nature, and so the baby that dies, dies as a sinful child. And when that child is received into heaven, he is received by grace. (RC Sproul, *Now, That’s a Good Question*, (1996) pgs. 294-295)

Declaratory Statements

The Supreme Standard in Presbyterian Churches is God’s Word, the Holy Bible. The Subordinate Standard is the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). To refute allegations regarding the holding of particular doctrines in her Confession some Presbyterian Churches have felt the need to publish a Declaratory Statement. The items contained in the Declaratory Statements serve to clarify the Church’s position on what the Bible teaches regarding certain controversial issues. The issue of the election and salvation of those dying in infancy was addressed by the Presbyterian Church in America in her 1903 Declaratory Statement:

[W]ith reference to Chapter X, Section 3, of the Confession of Faith, that it is not to be regarded as teaching that any who die in infancy are lost. We believe that all dying in infancy are included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when and where and how he pleases.

The ministers and elders who have signed the formula at their ordination or induction in the Presbyterian Church in America are one group of Calvinists who most certainly cannot be accused of teaching that any who die in infancy go to Hell. But have any of these Calvinists been compelled by their belief to murder their infants or have them aborted? Does history lend a shred of credence to the outrageous allegation that these Calvinists have been promoting infanticide on account of their doctrine? Has Charles Hodge, AA Hodge, Philip Schaff, BB Warfield, Loraine Boettner, Francis Nigel Lee or any others living or dead who held to or hold this doctrine ever been guilty of the murdering infants? The allegations are ludicrous and unfounded!

In a world where abortion is freely performed on demand, and where China’s one child policy has meant the certain death of untold millions of infants, there is a degree of comfort holding the view that they are safe with the Lord. This said, we believe however, that the Declaratory Statement of the PCUSA may go a little too far in that it binds the consciences of its ordinands to a doctrine that is at best today still only a probable hope. For it yet remains to be fully and irrefutably demonstrated that it is the infallible teaching of Scripture that all who die in infancy are saved.

To be sure, the doctrine that death in infancy proves the dead infant’s election is still in the process of development and needs to be held up to the careful scrutiny of those upholding the Reformed faith. This is not to say that this is by any means a new doctrine, otherwise the Presbyterian Church in

America would not include it as part of her Declaratory Statement. However, it does mean that at least the Presbyterian Church in America is free from all accusation that this once great Calvinist Denomination taught that there are any infants who die and go to Hell.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia in her 1901 Declaratory Statement words her declaration on this issue in such a way as to preserve the idea that it is a *probable* hope that all who die in infancy are saved:

That while none are saved except through the mediation of Christ, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who worketh when and where and how it pleaseth Him; while the duty of sending the Gospel to the heathen who are sunk in ignorance, sin, and misery is imperative; and while the outward and ordinary means of salvation for those capable of being called by the Word and the ordinances of the Gospel; in accepting the Subordinate Standard it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost, or that God may not extend His grace to any who are without the pale of ordinary means, as it may seem good in His sight. (Underlining mine)

It would be wonderful if the Statement meant the following: 'In accepting the Subordinate Standard it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost. Therefore the potential subscriber is not being granted freedom to hold the view that some babies who die go to Hell. The holding of this view is not required. Why? Because we who have already subscribed to the Subordinate Standard do not hold that view, for neither our Subordinate Standard nor the Bible from whence we derive our Subordinate Standard teach that any who die in infancy are lost.'

More than a century of history has proven the reality that the Declaratory Statement has done the exact opposite to the same item as declared in the American Declaratory Statement. For, the Australian Declaratory Statement has served to embrace those of a so-called '*Holy Willie*' persuasion (i.e., those who hold to infant damnation). Why state that it is not necessary to hold that any who die in infancy are lost if not to accommodate such as hold that some who die in infancy go to Hell? Yet though the Presbyterian Church of Australia has welcomed those who own this view, those who hold, and perhaps even utter it must make clear that this is not the view of the Presbyterian Church of Australia; which church reserves the right to guard against any discord caused by the propagation of this view. Thus the Presbyterian Church of Australia does not officially hold that any who die in infancy are lost. It simply recognizes and permits private ownership of this view.

Development of the Doctrine

Having noted that the doctrine that all who die in infancy are saved is still in a state of flux and in need of further development, testing, and refining, we now briefly consider the history and prior development of this doctrine. It will be seen that paedobaptism figures prominently in this issue. For what happens to a believer's infant should it die before baptism? Is the unbaptized infant damned to Hell? What does baptism mean in terms of God's Covenant of Grace? If infants of believing parents receive baptism because they are included in the covenant with their parents then are dying infants of believers saved according to the promises of the Covenant of Grace? These are the sorts of questions that led to the development of the Calvinist doctrine that all who die in infancy are probably saved.

BB Warfield

The American theologian Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921) held the view that all who die in infancy are probably saved. He stated the following:

The first step in the development of the doctrine of infant salvation was taken when the Church laid the foundation which from the beginning has stood firm, *Infants too are lost members of a lost race, and only those savingly united to Christ are saved*. In its definition of what infants are thus savingly united to Christ the early Church missed the path. All that are brought to Him in baptism, was the answer. Long ages passed before the second step was taken in the correct definition.

The way was prepared, indeed, by Augustine's doctrine of grace, by which salvation was made dependant on the dealings of God with the individual heart. But his eyes were holden

that he should not see it. It was reserved to Zwingli to proclaim it clearly. *All the elect children of God, who are regenerated by the Spirit who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth.* The sole question that remains is, Who of those that die in infancy are the elect children of God? Tentative answers were given. The children of God's people, said some. The children of God's people, with such others as His love has set upon to call, said others. *All those who die in infancy,* said others still; and to this reply Reformed thinking and not Reformed thinking only, but in one way or another, logically or illogically, the thinking of the Christian world has been converging.

Is it the Scriptural answer? It is as legitimate and as logical an answer as any, on Reformed postulates. It is legitimate on no other postulates. If it be really conformable to the Word of God it will stand; and the third step in the development of the doctrine of infant salvation is already taken. But if it stand, it can stand on no other theological basis than the Reformed.

If all infants dying in infancy are saved, it is certain that they are not saved by or through the ordinances of the visible Church (for they have not received them), nor through their own improvement of a grace common to all men (for they are incapable of activity); it can only be through the almighty operation of the Holy Spirit who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth, through whose ineffable grace the Father gathers these little ones to the home He has prepared for them. (BB Warfield, *Studies in Theology*, p. 444)

It should be noted that the salvation of those dying in infancy is dependent on God's grace alone; 'ineffable grace' as Warfield has called it. The grace of God was the guiding factor when the Calvinist or Reformed theologians compiled the two great Reformed Confessions already mentioned, viz., the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession of Faith. These documents (among others) are complimentary expressions of Federal or Covenant Theology.

For Reformed theologians the election of dying infants, Baptism, and every other doctrine of Scripture is viewed in terms of grace, i.e., God's Covenant of Grace. Water baptism is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace. Thus the covenant promise God has made to believers and to their children is signified, sealed, and exhibited (i.e., applied) to the recipient (which includes infants of believers) through water baptism. The water does not save, rather it points to the God who saves in His Son through the Holy Spirit who works when and where and how He pleases. God is sovereign in all things. Therefore should a believer lose a child in infancy he or she looks to God in terms of the Covenant of Grace for solace.

The Covenant of Grace is simply another name for the Gospel. Therefore the Good News of God's grace in Jesus Christ is the hermeneutic Federal or Covenant theologians use in interpreting Scripture. God is not capricious. He does not at a whim take our children away in infancy. He only does so in accordance with His own Covenant of Grace. If any infants of believers die and go to Hell His covenant promises would be open to doubt. Thus the reason for statement 1:17 of the Canons of Dort (repeated here):

Since we are to judge the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with the parents are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.

It is by way of the extension of grace that Calvinists hold to the probable election and salvation of all who die in infancy. For it is the same God of grace who calls out of this life in their infancy the children of believers as calls out of this life the infants of unbelievers. Are dying infants of unbelievers beyond the pale of election and salvation? Are they beyond the saving grace of God? Rome taught that infants cannot be saved without her baptism. That is why the doctrine that all who die in infancy are saved developed alongside a growing understanding of covenantal baptism.

Philip Schaff

The Swiss-American Church historian Philip Schaff says:

The Reformed Church teaches the salvation of all *elect* infants dying in infancy, whether *baptized or not*, and assumes that they are regenerated before their death, which, according to Calvinistic principles, is possible without water baptism. The second Scotch Confession, of 1580, expressly rejects, among other errors of popery, ‘the cruel judgment against infants departing without the sacrament.’ Beyond this the Confession does not go, and leaves the mysterious subject to private opinion.

Some of the older more rigid Calvinistic divines of the supralapsarian type carried the distinction between the elect and the reprobate into the infant world, though always securing salvation to the offspring of Christian parents, on the ground of inherited Church membership before and independent of baptismal ratification; while others more wisely and charitably kept silence, and left the non-elect infants – if there are such, which nobody knows – to the uncovenanted mercies of God.

But we may still go a step further, within the strict limits of the Reformed Creed, and maintain, as a pious opinion, that all departed infants belong to the number of the elect. Their early removal from a world of sin and temptation may be taken as an indication of God’s special favor. From this it would follow that the majority of the human race will be saved. The very doctrine of election, which is unlimitable and free of all ordinary means, at all events widens the possibility and strengthens the probability of general infant salvation ...

Zwingli was the first to emancipate the *salvation of children* dying in infancy from the supposed indispensable condition of water baptism, and to extend it beyond the boundaries of the visible Church. This is a matter of very great interest, since the unbaptized children far outnumber the baptized, and constitute nearly one half of the race.

He teaches repeatedly that all elect children are saved whether baptized or not, whether of Christian or heathen parentage, not on the ground of their innocence (which would be Pelagian), but on the ground of Christ’s atonement. He is inclined to the belief that all children dying in infancy belong to the elect; their early death being a token of God’s mercy, and hence their election. A part of the elect are led to salvation by a holy life, another part by an early death. The children of Christian parents belong to the Church, and it would be ‘impious’ to condemn them. But from the parallel between the first and the second Adam, he infers that all children are saved from the ruin of sin, else what Paul says would not be true, that ‘as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive’ (1 Cor. xv. 22).

At all events, it is wrong to condemn children of the heathen, both on account of the restoration of Christ and of the eternal election of God, which precedes faith, and produces faith in due time; hence the absence of faith in children is no ground for their condemnation. As he believed in the salvation of many adult heathen, he had less difficulty believing that heathen children are saved; for they have not committed actual transgression, and of hereditary sin they have been redeemed by Christ. We have therefore much greater certainty of the salvation of departed infants than any adults. (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. 1, pgs. 380-381 & 378-379)

Schaff above mentions ‘some of the older more rigid Calvinistic divines of the supralapsarian type’. In Reformed or Covenant Theology it has been posited that there are two groups in mankind, viz., those who are elected by God’s grace and those who are reprobated by His justice. Supralapsarians do not doubt the election and salvation of covenant infants who die. However, because they make no distinction between unbelieving adults and their infants, some supralapsarians logically hold the view that if God damns unbelieving adults He must also damn their dying infants.

The weakness of this view is that it is dealing only with hypotheticals. There is no recorded case in Scripture of any infant who is known to have died and gone to Hell. Therefore the supralapsarian at best can only say that there ‘has to be’, but not that there ‘are’, definite infants who have died and gone to Hell.

Was William Fisher some sort of older more rigid Calvinist of the supralapsarian type? Perhaps. But if he was, his reprobate dying infants are not real people. They are merely hypotheticals and, with his view, he would be going far beyond, and (arguably) even contrary to, the Westminster Confession of

Faith. Perhaps *Holy Willie's* reasoning went something like this: 'There are elect and reprobates in mankind. Mankind consists of infants through elderly. Therefore there must also be infants who are reprobate.' However, our discussion is not about infants *per se*, but *dying* infants. We are not talking about Jacob and Esau, because, neither of these died in infancy. But we are saying that infant death is proof of the non-reprobation of infants, i.e., their election by grace.

Without any recorded incident of any infant dying and going to Hell the supralapsarian does not have the infallible proof of Scripture to back his doctrine. All is left to the hypothetical. Therefore he cannot know for sure that any who die in infancy are lost. Thus even 'some of the older more rigid Calvinistic divines of the supralapsarian type' are not teaching that there are actual infants who have died and have gone to Hell, only that there possibly might be. Therefore *Holy Willie* would have been wiser keeping his view of infant damnation private and to himself, that way Robert Burns would not have mistaken all Calvinists as *Holy Willies*. But for all that both supra- and infralapsarians agree that infants and little children are numbered among the elect and saved.

Because of his understanding of the eternal decrees of God the supralapsarian is loath to agree that all infant death is proof of their election and salvation. For him, the decree of God to elect and reprobate comes prior to the Fall of mankind in the mind of God. For, unlike the infralapsarian who holds that God elects from out of the whole mass of humanity viewed by God as already fallen, the supralapsarian holds that God elects and reprobates without reference to these real and fallen people. Thus, for the supralapsarian God is seen only to be dealing with hypothetical people (as opposed to the real and actual people – dealt with by infralapsarianism). The supralapsarian view of election and reprobation does not have God take account of the impact and effects of the Fall on mankind, such as infant death, mental retardation etc., hence the supralapsarian private belief that there might just possibly be some infants who have died and gone to Hell.

In the Covenant of Grace God promises salvation to believers and to their children. Since this promise is always in terms of grace to the fallen it necessarily follows that because God saves people out of the fallen mass of humanity, He also has elected them from the fallen mass before the foundation of the world. Thus the infralapsarian viewing salvation in terms of God's covenant grace to real fallen people, also views election and reprobation in terms of God's covenant grace to real fallen people. And, since real fallen people die in infancy, and the time of their death is part of God's sovereign and eternal covenant plan, infralapsarians may and do hold that infant death is evidence that the Father, by His grace, by His eternal covenant, is gathering these little ones to the home He has prepared for them.

Robert S Candlish

Robert Candlish holds the death of little children to be one of the fruits of redemption.

In many ways, I apprehend, it may be inferred from Scripture that all dying in infancy are elect, and are therefore saved... The whole analogy of the plan of saving mercy seems to favour the same view. And now it may seem, if I am not greatly mistaken, to be put beyond question by the bare fact that little children die... The death of little children must be held to be one of the fruits of redemption... (Robert S Candlish, *The Atonement* {1867} pgs. 183, 184 as quoted by BB Warfield, *Studies in Theology*, p. 432)

Thus if the death of little children really is one of the fruits of redemption as Candlish suggests, then the death of the little children must have been included in the divine decree which is the root that supplies the fruit of redemption. Thus, viewed infralapsarianly, it is possible to see the probability that all who die in infancy are saved. For the death of infants and little children would simply be the Father plucking fruit from the tree of redemption.

Loraine Boettner

Unlike the supra- and infralapsarian Calvinists who view salvation as being by grace alone, the Arminian order of salvation is based upon the positive response of fallen man to God. Therefore the Arminian must either declare innocent of original sin all those who cannot intelligently respond (such as all infants, little children, imbeciles etc.) or else condemn them all to Hell if they die as such. But neither of these two positions can be drawn from Scripture. Lorain Boettner contrasts the Calvinist and Arminian orders of salvation:

Most Calvinistic theologians have held that those who die in infancy are saved. The Scriptures seem to teach plainly enough that the children of believers are saved; but they are silent or practically so in regard to those of the heathens. The Westminster Confession does not pass judgment on the children of heathens who die before coming to years of accountability. Where the Scriptures are silent, the Confession, too, preserves silence. Our outstanding theologians, however, mindful of the fact that God's "tender mercies are over all His works," and depending on His mercy widened as broadly as possible, have entertained a charitable hope that since these infants have never committed any actual sin themselves, their inherited sin would be pardoned and they would be saved on wholly evangelical principles.

Such, for instance, was the position held by Charles Hodge, W. G. T. Shedd, and B. B. Warfield. Concerning those who die in infancy, Dr. Warfield says: "Their destiny is determined irrespective of their choice, by an unconditional decree of God, suspended for its execution on no act of their own; and their salvation is wrought by an unconditional application of the grace of Christ to their souls, through the immediate and irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit prior to and apart from any action of their own proper wills..."

And if death in infancy does depend on God's providence, it is assuredly God in His providence who selects this vast multitude to be made participants of His unconditional salvation... This is but to say that they are unconditionally predestinated to salvation from the foundation of the world. If only a single infant dying in irresponsible infancy be saved, the whole Arminian principle is traversed. If all infants dying such are saved, not only the majority of the saved, but doubtless the majority of the human race hitherto, have entered into life by a non-Arminian pathway."

Certainly there is nothing in the Calvinistic system which would prevent us from believing this; and until it is proven that God could not predestinate to eternal life all those whom He is pleased to call in infancy we may be permitted to hold this view. (Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, (1932) p. 144)

Westminster Confession of Faith 10:3:

The Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 10:3 has already been referred to when we looked at the American and Australian Declaratory Statements regarding infant salvation. The paragraph of the Confession comes under the heading – *Of Effectual Calling*. Therefore paragraph three is primarily dealing with how elect infants dying in infancy are effectually called by God.

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word. (WCF 10:3)

Francis Nigel Lee

Australia's Francis Nigel Lee comments:

The *Confession* at its 10:3... has never taught that only some of those dying in infancy -- are elect. Still less has it ever implied that others dying in infancy are not elect. It has always taught that even when God's elect die while yet infants, they must first be regenerated through His Spirit. For indeed, they must first (however incipiently) be brought to faith in Christ before they die, in order to please God. Hebrews 11:6.

The *Confession* does not here (or elsewhere) address the question as to whether all early-dying persons are elect; whether most of such are elect; whether they are sometimes elect; or whether they are rarely elect. The emphasis here is **not** on the possible **un**-regeneratedness of **any** who die in infancy. The stress is rather on the **re-generatedness** of all of the elect before they die, and therefore even on the **re-generatedness** of such of the elect as **die during infancy**.

Indeed, **all** of the footnotes given at this point in the original *Confession* itself -- are highly significant. They are: Luke 18:15f; Acts 2:38f; John 3:3f; First John 5:12; and Romans 8:9. These passages all establish either the present **regeneratedness** or the soon **regeneratability** also of infants and other persons. But they do not establish any alleged non-regeneratability or even non-regeneratedness.

Consequently, then, the *Confession* 10:3 neither affirms nor denies that early-dying infants of unbelievers are among the non-elect. However, it indeed teaches that all early-dying elect infants (whether of believing or of unbelieving parents) become regenerated before they die. (Francis Nigel Lee, *Infant Salvation – Are Any Dying Babies Lost?* (1995 expanded edition) p. 129)

Lee goes on to speak on the everlasting destiny of aborted and miscarried fetuses

Before the end of the nineteenth century, especially in third world countries most people who ever lived -- also died before the end of their babyhood. The advent of modern medicine, however, then very drastically reduced the huge infant mortality rate.

Yet at the end of the twentieth century, man's appreciation of the value of human life has again become cheap. In several countries, there are already more abortions than live births. In addition, some estimate that perhaps seventy percent of all pregnancies miscarry during the first week. If, however, as we ourselves believe, everlasting human existence indeed commences at conception -- the eternal destiny of all who die young becomes especially critical.

Now Holy Scripture teaches that an everlasting image of God comes into being the moment a human being is conceived. Psalm 51:5f & Zechariah 12:1. It certainly seems also to teach that all who die before their birth, enter into the presence of the Lord. Indeed, it seems their condition in the hereafter is better than of those who live longer and healthier lives. Job 3:1-19f; Ecclesiastes 4:2f; 6:3-5; 7:1; 11:5f; 12:1f.

Also Ezekiel 16:20f makes it plain that the tiny infants murdered and offered alive as sacrifices by their ungodly parents, are themselves among God's very elect. For He Himself there calls them: "My children." Thus even the Apostle Paul -- while comparing himself to one born prematurely -- insists that he was **elect**. First Corinthians 15:8 and Titus 1:1.

Among patristic documents, the *Didache* and the *Epistle to Diognetus* plainly condemn abortion as a wicked sin. Yet the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Vision of Paul* make it clear that even though aborting parents, unless they repent, will spend eternity in hell themselves -- all their aborted infants at death go straight into everlasting glory. (Francis Nigel Lee, *Infant Salvation – Are Any Dying Babies Lost?* (1995 expanded edition) pgs. 181-182)

Rowland S Ward

Commenting on this (10:3) section of the WCF the Australian theologian Rowland S Ward says:

The natural question to raise at this point is, "What about elect persons who cannot be outwardly called by the ministry of the word because they are infants or mentally incapable? Section 3 answers this by affirming that such persons are saved by Christ through the Spirit just as are any other elect persons. In short, such persons, being members of a fallen race, need salvation but they have it on the same basis as others. Ordinarily, persons show the fruit of regeneration in repentance, faith and evangelical obedience whereas this fruit is not evident to us in the case of elect infants dying such or mental incompetents. However, regeneration may still occur and issue in its fruit in glory.

This is an important emphasis. Some churches stress the necessity of baptism for salvation of an infant dying such, so that without it they are lost. Others stress that salvation is conditioned on conscious faith. As infants or persons who lack the faculty of reason cannot have such

conscious faith, their salvation is not possible on such a basis. Only when the Biblical teaching is upheld of the effective call of God, of which faith is the fruit in the normal adult, is there a solid basis on which the possibility of the salvation of infants and the mentally incompetent can rest.

Since the confession is dealing with the way by which infants may be saved and not the number of such persons, the appropriateness of the term '*elect* infants' is clear. This term implies the need of redemption for infants and thus safeguards against the notion that original sin is not of itself damning. Failure to recognise this orientation of this section of the Confession has led many to infer that there are some in the category of infants who are not elect. This is not a necessary inference and in fact the large number of Calvinists have always held that the infant children of believers are saved who die in infancy or in the womb and many have held that *all* infants dying such are saved.

It is of interest that the Baptist Confession of 1689, which was modelled on Westminster, removes the word *elect* qualifying infants in this section and asserts the regeneration of all children dying in infancy. The PCUSA did the same in 1903. Still the lack of positive assertion to this effect is desirable since a plausible inference should not be bound on the conscience in a creed even though it be the common belief, nor should any suggestion that children do not need redemption be allowed a place. All who are saved are saved because they are elect.

It is certainly true that Calvinists have the only satisfactory basis for affirming the salvation of any infants or of any grown persons who have never had the power for reason. For those predicating salvation on participation of the sacraments cannot point a finger at the Confession, nor can those who predicate salvation on the profession of a conscious faith. But salvation predicated on the electing love of the Father, the atonement of Christ and regeneration of the Spirit finds no obstacle to the salvation of those who cannot be called by the outward ministry of the word. Hence, it is open to a subscriber to the Confession to believe *all* infants dying such are saved in this way although he cannot assert it as the authoritative teaching of the church. (Rowland S Ward, *The Westminster Confession For The Church Today*, (1992) pgs. 87-88)

Robert Shaw

Scotsman Robert Shaw when commenting on the Confession, like the Confession itself, simply leaves the door ajar regarding the possibility that all who die in infancy are saved. Comments Shaw:

The Holy Spirit usually works by means; and the Word, read or preached, is the ordinary means which He renders effectual to the salvation of sinners. But He has immediate access to the hearts of men, and can produce a saving change in them without the use of ordinary means. 'As infants are not fit subjects of instruction, their regeneration must be effected without means, by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit on their souls. There are adult persons, too, to whom the use of reason has been denied. It would be harsh and unwarrantable to suppose that they are, on this account, excluded from salvation; and to such of them as God has chosen, it may be applied in the same manner as to infants.' (Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, (1845) p. 164 also quoting Dick's *Lectures on Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 265)

BB Warfield

BB Warfield makes the following point regarding the Confession:

Westminster Confession of Faith X. i. And iii. The opinion that a body of non-elect infants dying in infancy and not saved is implied in this passage, although often controversially asserted, is not only a wholly unreasonable opinion exegetically, but is absolutely negated by the history of the formation of this clause in the Assembly as recorded in the "Minutes," and has never found favor among the expositors of the Confession. David Dickson's (1684)

treatment of the section shows that he understands it to be directed against the Anabaptists; and all careful students of the Confession understand it as above, including Shaw, Hodge, Macpherson, and Mitchell. The same is true of all schools of adherents to the Confession. (BB Warfield, *Studies in Theology*, (1932) footnote 79, p. 436)

AA Hodge

American theologian A. A. Hodge comments on regeneration and then on the WCF 10:3:

Infants, as well as adults, are rational and moral agents, and by nature totally depraved. The difference is, that the faculties of infants are in the germ, while those of adults are developed. As regeneration is a change wrought by creative power in the inherent moral condition of the soul, infants may plainly be subjects of it in precisely the same sense as adults; in both cases the operation is miraculous, and therefore inscrutable.

The fact is established by what the Scriptures teach of innate depravity, of infant salvation, of infant circumcision, and baptism – Luke i. 15; xviii. 15, 16; Acts ii. 39. (AA Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, (1860) pgs. 463-464)

And AA Hodge commenting on WCF 10:3 says,

The outward call of God's Word, and all the "means of grace" provided in the present dispensation, of course presuppose intelligence upon the part of those who receive them. The will of God, also, is revealed only as far as it concerns those capable of understanding and profiting by the revelation. His purposes with respect to either persons or classes not thus addressed are not explicitly revealed.

If infants and others not capable of being called by the gospel are to be saved, they must be regenerated and sanctified immediately by God without use of means. If God created Adam holy without means, and if He can re-create believers in righteousness and true holiness by the use of means which a large part of men use without profit, He can certainly make infants and others regenerate without means. Indeed, the natural depravity of infants lies before moral action, in the judicial depravation of the Holy Ghost. The evil is rectified at that stage, therefore, by the gracious restoration of the soul to its moral relation to the Spirit of God.

The phrase "elect infants" is precise and fit for its purpose. It is not intended to suggest that there are any infants not elect, but simply to point out the facts – (1.) That all infants are born under righteous condemnation; and (2.) That no infant has any claim in itself to salvation; and hence (3.) The salvation of each infant, precisely as the salvation of every adult, must have its absolute ground in the *sovereign election of God*. This would be just as true if all adults were elected, as it is now that only some adults are elected. It is, therefore, just as true, although we have good reason to believe the *all* infants are elected.

The Confession adheres in this place accurately to the facts revealed. It is certainly revealed that none, either adult or infant, is saved except on the ground of a sovereign election; that is, all salvation for the human race is pure grace. It is not positively revealed that all infants are elect, but we are left, for many reasons to indulge a highly probable hope that such is the fact. The Confession affirms what is certainly revealed, and leaves that which revelation has not decided to remain, without the suggestion of a positive opinion upon one side or the other. (AA Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, (1869) pgs. 174-175)

Charles Hodge

AA Hodge's father, Charles Hodge, while defending the Reformed view of paedobaptism against the Lutheran view as espoused by one Dr. Krauth declares:

We are sorry to see that Dr. Krauth labours to prove that the Westminster Confession teaches that only a certain part, or some of those who die in infancy, are saved; this he does by putting

his own construction on the language of that Confession. We can only say that we never saw a Calvinistic theologian who held that doctrine. We are not learned enough to venture the assertion that no Calvinist ever held it; but if all Calvinists are responsible for what every Calvinist ever said, and all Lutherans are responsible for everything Luther or Lutherans have ever said, then Dr. Krauth as well as ourselves will have a heavy burden to carry. (Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, (1871-73) Vol. 3, footnote 4 on p. 605)

The following are a portion of comments made by Charles Hodge on *What the Scriptures teach as to the Salvation of Infants*:

What the Scriptures teach on this subject, according to the common doctrine of evangelical Protestants is first:-

All who die in infancy are saved. This is inferred from what the Bible teaches of the analogy between Adam and Christ. "As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many ... were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many ... be made righteous." (Rom. V. 18, 19.) We have no right to put any limit on these general terms, except what the Bible itself places on them. The Scriptures nowhere excludes any class of infants, baptized or unbaptized, born in Christian or in heathen lands, of believing or unbelieving parents, from the benefits of the redemption of Christ. All the descendants of Adam, except those of whom it is expressly revealed that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God, are saved. This appears to be the clear meaning of the Apostle, and therefore he does not hesitate to say that where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded, that the benefits of redemption far exceed the evils of the fall; that the number of the saved far exceeds the number of the lost.

This is not inconsistent with the declaration of our Lord, in Matthew vii. 14, that only a few enter the gate which leadeth unto life. This is to be understood of adults. What the Bible says is intended for those in all ages, to whom it is addressed. But it is addressed to those who can either read or hear. It tells them what they are to believe and do. It would be an entire perversion of its meaning to make it apply to those to whom and of whom it does not speak. When it is said, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John iii. 36), no one understands this to preclude the possibility of the salvation of infants.

Not only, however, does the comparison, which the Apostle makes between Adam and Christ, lead to the conclusion that as all are condemned for the sin of the one, so all are saved by the righteousness of the other, those only excepted whom the Scriptures except; but the principle assumed throughout the whole discussion teaches the same doctrine. That principle is that it is more congenial with the nature of God to bless than to curse, to save than to destroy. If the race fell in Adam, much more shall it be restored in Christ. If death reigned by one, much more shall grace reign by one. This "much more" is repeated over and over. The Bible everywhere teaches that God delighteth not in the death of the wicked; that judgment is a strange work. It is therefore, contrary not only to the argument of the Apostle, but to the whole spirit of the passage (Romans v. 12-21), to exclude infants from "the all" who are made alive in Christ.

The conduct and language of our Lord in reference to children are not to be regarded as matters of sentiment, or simply expressive of kindly feeling. He evidently looked upon them as the lambs of the flock for which, as the good Shepherd, He laid down His life, and of whom He tells us is the kingdom of heaven, as though heaven was, in great measure, composed of the souls of redeemed infants. It is, therefore, the general belief of Protestants, contrary to the doctrines of Romanists and Romanizers, that all who die in infancy are saved. (Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, (1871-73) Vol. 1, pgs. 26, 27)

Neil Cullan McKinlay

How did Jesus view and treat infants and little children who were brought to Him? "Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But

when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.' And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them." Mark 10:13-16.

Some versions render the words of Jesus in Mark 10:14b thus: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" Mark 10:14b. To some nowadays the word "suffer" might conjure up an image of pain and anguish. But "Suffer the little children" has got little to do with letting the little children suffer.

But then again, as one looks a little closer at this text, one sees that the disciples were causing the children to, in another sense, suffer. For some reason they didn't want people bringing their children to Jesus for Him to touch and bless them. However, their actions brought the Lord's indignation! But as the Lord rebuked them He at the same time taught them how to view and to treat little children.

Note first that the Lord was GREATLY displeased at the behavior of His disciples. They were rebuking people for bringing their young children to Him. The people wanted the Lord to touch their little ones and ask that the Father bless them. But the disciples were making it hard for them by preventing the children from coming to Him. And this was most displeasing to the LORD. So the Lord rebuked His disciples for rebuking the people for bringing the young children. Instead He says, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them..."

Looking at the negative side of things one sees that the Lord rebuked His disciples in His displeasure. But *why* did the Lord rebuke His disciples? The disciples here knew what they had done wrong. They knew because the Lord told them in no uncertain terms. Yet we find that the words of the Lord's rebuke are rich and full of meaning and good doctrine.

The Lesson of the Little Children

Why then did the disciples try to prevent the little children coming to Jesus? First we must set the scene. Jesus had been teaching various people about marriage. Then some Pharisees had brought up the subject of divorce. Shortly after this His disciples bring up the subject again while in a house (Mark 10:10). Whether the house is big or small we don't know, we're not told. But people were beginning to bring their little children into the house to see Jesus. The Lord had been teaching the people about where marriage fit into the scheme of things. But now the lesson turns to that which marriage ordinarily produces – children!

Where do little children fit in? Well, according to the disciples they don't fit in anywhere! At this point it would seem that they believed in the old adage: *Children should be seen and not heard!* But let's try to be fair to these disciples and try to figure out what might have been going on here.

People are bringing little children to Jesus. They want Him to place His hands on them and bless them. They're coming into the lounge room or wherever the Lord was in the house. So maybe the disciples meant nothing more than, "*Hey! You can't bring all those kids in here!*" But from the way the Lord answered them, we get the clear impression there is more to it than that.

Some of the little children were "infants". Luke records this incident in his Gospel and he mentions "infants" (Luke 18:15). So there's more to it than, "*You kids better not run around and carry on in here!*" The thing that makes it obvious that there is lot more to this than the disciples just innocently trying to keep a bit of peace and order about the place are the words in v. 14, "He was greatly displeased". The Lord wasn't just displeased - He was GREATLY displeased! "Indignant" – the NIV would have it. In simple terms, the Lord was angry. He was angry with His disciples. And He was angry with them for not letting the little children come to Him.

Now then, we know that it takes a lot to get the Lord angry, don't we? And we have to note that the Lord's anger is a pure anger. It's not an anger tainted with sin. The Lord gets angry but His anger and His wrath is like everything else in the universe – it is always under His sovereign control. Therefore the Lord here is displaying to His disciples "righteous indignation". And what Christian in his right mind would ever want to have the Lord look at him with righteous indignation? This would be as close to Hell as any Christian would ever want to come. To have your beloved Master whom you love rebuke

you is a thing to be avoided. Yet the Lord rebuked His disciples for their actions – Why? It was because they GRIEVED the Lord!

You've heard about "grieving" the Holy Spirit? To "grieve" the Holy Spirit is to offend His holiness and wound His love. (Charles Hodge). These disciples were offending the holiness of Christ; the One whom Luke calls the "Holy One" even from the moment of His conception by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35).

The Lord's disciples wounded the holiness of Christ by placing a stumbling block before these little ones. "And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea" says Jesus in Mark 9:42. The disciples were wounding the love of Christ, the love He has for the children of His Kingdom. His Kingdom belongs to these little children and to those who are like children. Christ is grieved that His disciples – at least at this point in time – did not understand this. The ignorance of the disciples at this point is causing the Lord to express His displeasure!

The disciples still had a lot to learn about the Lord and His kingdom. They wrongly assumed that the Lord had no time for little children. They thought that the Lord was interested only in grown-ups – people who could *understand*. In this the disciples were treating these children as "unbelievers", i.e., too young to believe. But the Lord gave the little children their place. He treated them as *believers* because that is what they were. And what more proof did the disciples need? For the Lord actually blessed them.

What a humbling sight it must have been for the disciples to see the way the Lord treated the little children. Right before their very eyes, "And He took them up in His arms." Mark 10:16. Literally He embraced them. He gathered them in His arms. This is the One who would later lament over Jerusalem saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!"

The Lord took the little children up in His arms, "put His hands on them, and blessed them." But He was greatly displeased with His disciples for trying to stop this from taking place. So He humbled the grownup disciples while at the same time exalted the little children.

The Kingdom Belongs to Little Children

It is the Lord's pleasure that we: "Let the little children come to Him, and that we do not forbid them." Why did the Lord want the little children to come to Him? Well, the Lord makes a very revealing statement: "For of such is the kingdom of God." The NIV renders these words, "For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Therefore the Lord wants the little children to come to Him because they own His kingdom.

How did the Lord know the kingdom of God belonged to these particular children? Being just infants, how did Jesus know which child was a believer and which child wasn't? Doesn't the kingdom of God belong only to believers? To which we answer with a resounding YES. So what's Jesus doing then? He's saying that the Kingdom belongs to these little children.

First off we need to make it clear as to what He means by Kingdom of God. The church on earth is sometimes referred to as the Kingdom of God. Is Jesus saying the church on earth belongs to the little children? No! He means more than that. He means that the kingdom God, i.e., the kingdom of heaven belongs to these children. (The church is the visible expression of heaven on earth).

So then, if these children were too little to make any profession of faith: How did the Lord know the kingdom belonged to them? One might answer that question by saying that the Lord knows all things. But that's not the answer we're looking for. For what would have happened if one of these little children happened to be an unbeliever? Would the Lord not have said to the disciples, "Let only those little children come to Me who are believers, but forbid those who don't believe"? But that's not what the Lord said. It was the Lord's pleasure that *all* the little children be let come to Him. Anyway, how were the disciples supposed to know which ones believed and which ones didn't? They were all too young to make verbal profession of faith.

Believers or Potential Believers?

Thus there is more here than meets the eye. For, the Lord is treating all the little children as if they *already* are believers. But the disciples treated the little children as if they were *unbelievers!* Or if you want to soften it (but say the same thing), the disciples treated the little children not considering whether they were believers or not. But Jesus received them as if they actually were believers.

And make no mistake about it. Jesus didn't treat these little children as *potential* believers. When you look at the little children in church, are you looking at believers or unbelievers? If you say you don't know what they are, then ask yourself why you don't know what they are when Jesus has already shown us what they are! He has shown us by example how we are to treat the little children. Thus we are to treat them as if they *already* are Christians, i.e., as children of the kingdom.

Therefore how ought we to view and treat little children in the church? Do we view and treat them as believers or just *potential* believers? If we treat them as only potential believers are we not then treating them as unbelievers? Far better and far safer to treat the children the way the Lord is telling us and showing us to treat them.

Yet when you look around the different churches today you see a quite different picture. You see church after church refusing little children the covenant ordinance of baptism, for instance. If you enquire as to why they don't baptize the children to whom the kingdom of God belongs you might hear the refrain: "We only baptize believers." But what about the little children of believers? How ought we treat our children – as believers or unbelievers? Those who refuse to have the covenant sign and seal of baptism placed upon their infants have to admit that they are treating their children as if they are unbelievers; as vipers in diapers! And if these say they treat their little children as *potential* believers they are merely saying and doing the same thing! These have to admit that they are treating the little children as if they are children of the devil! But Jesus is rebuking and correcting this wrong way of treating little children to whom the kingdom of God belongs.

Now granted, God forbid, but some of the little children might grow up and not want a bar of the kingdom of God. But if this happens they would no longer be little children then, would they? But the kingdom of God belongs to little children. Could it be any clearer that this is exactly what Jesus is saying? Thus, if you are a little child then you are an owner of the kingdom of God. Shouldn't we therefore treat the little children the way the Lord would have us treat them? We must refuse to treat them as little vipers in diapers! Instead let's treat them as children wrapped, not in cotton wool, but in the kingdom of God. Which is to say that we ought to presume them innocent until someone can prove to us that the kingdom of Heaven does not belong to them.

What about the little children's sin? Aren't little children sinners from the very moment of conception? Of course all children are sinners! (E.g., Psalm 51; Job 14:4). We all carry the guilt of our forefather Adam's sin, i.e., Adam the federal head of mankind. And so did those little children whom the disciples tried to prevent from coming to Jesus. But what did Jesus say about little children? "Of such is the kingdom of God." Tell a three year old, for instance, about Jesus, do you think he'll believe you? He believes what you tell him to believe. This is what Jesus means when He says, "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" Luke 18:17.

The kingdom of God belongs to little children and those who are like little children, i.e., those who have a believing spirit. Some might argue that when Jesus says, "Of such is the kingdom" He is not talking about little children but about people who are *like* little children. But who are more like little children than little children themselves. And Jesus *was* talking about little children when He said these words. Therefore the idea is that grown ups are to believe as little children believe if they are to enter the kingdom. This doesn't mean that we have to become childish! We've not to become childish but rather childlike.

Becoming as Little Children

Indeed our Lord in Matthew 18:2-6 illustrated this very point to His disciples by actually setting a little child in the midst of them, saying, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as

little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Please do not miss the impact of what the Lord is saying in these verses. He is calling this little child a ‘believer.’ For He says, “...whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin...”

The Apostle Paul by the Holy Spirit concurs that infants and little children are able to believe, where he says to Timothy, “...[F]rom childhood [infancy] you have known the Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:15. And who does not rejoice in the fact that John the Baptizer when only six months after his conception in his mother Elizabeth’s womb showed definite signs of regeneration, “For indeed, as soon as the voice of your [i.e., Mary newly pregnant with Jesus] greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.” Luke 1:44 with 1:41.

Who then can deny that infants and little children by the grace of God are able to believe? Indeed, has not the Psalmist already said of God, “Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger.” Psalm 8:2. John Calvin commenting on Psalm 8:2 says,

He [David the psalmist] enters upon the proof of the subject which he had undertaken to discourse upon, declaring, that the providence of God, in order to make itself known to mankind, does not wait till men arrive at the age of maturity, but even from the very dawn of infancy shines forth so brightly as is sufficient to confute all the ungodly, who, through their profane contempt of God, would wish to extinguish His very name. (Underlining mine)

Summary & Covenant Baptism

Thus far we’ve seen that it is the Lord’s pleasure that we treat the little children as He treated them. Thus we are to treat them as Christians. They are “holy” as the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:14. We’re not to treat them like little vipers in diapers! They are not the children of the devil. They are children of the kingdom of God, covenant children, which means, of course, that they need to be urged to keep on repenting and keep on believing the Gospel. For this is how Christians treat other Christians, isn’t it? They encourage each other to keep on looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.

The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, one of the early Protestant confessions, regarding the status of infants of believing parents firmly states the Biblical view in the following:

We condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that young infants, born of faithful parents, are to be baptized. For, according to the doctrine of the Gospel, ‘theirs is the kingdom of God’ (Luke xviii. 16), and they are written in the covenant of God (Acts iii. 25). Why, then, should not the sign of the covenant of God be given to them? Why should they not be consecrated by holy baptism, who are God’s peculiar people and are in the church of God? We condemn also the Ana Baptists in the rest of those peculiar opinions which they hold against the Word of God. We therefore are not Anabaptists, neither do we agree with them in any point that is theirs. Chapter XX.

For fear of confusing Anabaptists with Baptists, the editor of Philip Schaff’s “The Creeds of Christendom” is quick to point out the following in a footnote regarding this portion of the Confession:

It should be remembered that the Anabaptists who were so often condemned in the Lutheran and Reformed confessions of the sixteenth century were fanatical and revolutionary in their opinions, and must not be confounded with the English and American Baptists, who arose in the seventeenth century and have grown to be one of the largest and most respectable Protestant denominations.

Baptists

With the above caveat we consider the Baptist view regarding those little children who are not within the ordinary scope of God’s Covenant people. This is where both the Arminian Baptists and the non-

Arminian Baptists show great inconsistency with their belief systems. The Arminian Baptist believes that God gives grace only to those who make profession of faith. Thus he withholds the baptismal water from infants! But how then can any who die in infancy be saved? But like the Arminian the non-Arminian Baptist too refuses to baptize the children of believers on the same grounds, i.e., that infants are unable to make a credible profession of faith. Thus both Arminian and non-Arminian Baptists are guilty of denying that the kingdom of God belongs to the infants and little children of believers. Thus, also the non-Arminian Baptist is as Arminian as the Arminian Baptist, at least when it comes to the subject of baptism. For the non-Arminian Baptist, like his Arminian Baptist brother, believes that only those who are able to make a credible profession of faith are candidates for baptism, which sign and seal belongs only to those who are in the covenant.

Yet the Baptist Confession of 1689, (which was modeled on the Westminster Confession of Faith), by removing the word *elect* from “*Elect infants,*” so as to read, “*Infants dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through His Spirit, who worketh when, where, and how he pleaseth...*” declares that the kingdom of God also belongs to more than those able to make a verbal profession of faith. For it grants to *all* who die in infancy, (including all those who die in infancy outside of the covenant), salvation, not by profession of faith, but salvation by God’s grace alone.

On what grounds, then, does the non-Arminian Baptist reject the more Biblical, i.e., the paedobaptist view of the Presbyterian and Reformed? For clearly the kingdom of God belongs to, at the very least, (as the Baptist Confession admits), believers and their infants and little children. Thus the non-Arminian Baptists are inconsistent in that they withhold the sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace, even water baptism, from those who clearly own the kingdom of God, until such infants and little children are old enough to make a credible profession of their faith.

And if that were not enough to alert the non-Arminian Baptist of his inconsistency, the 1689 Confession by going beyond the Westminster Confession, goes as far as to say that the kingdom of God belongs also to *all* who die in infancy! Thus the non-Arminian Baptist gives himself only two ways of testing whether infants and little children are in the covenant (and ought therefore to receive the Sacrament of Baptism). These two ways are viz., 1. The death of the infant or child! Or 2. His or her subsequent profession of faith when more mature! It is far too late to baptize when the baptisee is dead! For baptism by itself does not regenerate, but is the application of the promise of God to the recipient, which is to say that baptism is the sign and seal of God’s covenant.

But there is yet a far easier way to tell if the kingdom of God belongs to the infant or little child. For Jesus did not withhold His blessing from the infants and little children that were brought to Him, until they were old enough to make a credible profession of faith. No, He blessed them because they were blessed by being born into the covenant!

The Directory For the Publick Worship of God

Westminster’s Directory for the Publick Worship of God when addressing baptism and its candidates states *inter alia*:

Before baptism, the minister is to use some words of instruction, touching the institution, nature, use, and ends of this sacrament, shewing ... That the promise is made to believers and to their seed; and that the seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church, have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to seal of it, and to the outward privileges of the church, under the gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament; the covenant of grace, for substance, being the same; and the grace of God, and the consolation of believers, more plentiful than before: That the Son of God admitted little children into His presence, embracing and blessing them, saying, For of such is the kingdom of God: That children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh: That they are Christians, and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are to be baptized...

The Bible passages we have already looked at clearly demonstrate that Jesus blessed those children brought to Him. This suggests that the parents themselves were Christians or at least wished Jesus to

bless their children. However, these passages do not preclude the possibility that Jesus blesses or saves all the world's early-dying. Francis Nigel Lee comments on the parents who brought their children to Jesus,

For these were not Pagan parents but Christ-professing if not even Christ-believing covenant parents who brought their children to Jesus for Him to bless them. This probably implies the same as regards such Siro-Phoenician parents – and just possibly that He might also wish to bless, and perhaps even bless, the infants also of Christ-hating parents. (Francis Nigel Lee, Email to me).

Conclusion

The little children Jesus welcomed were clearly covenant children, and of such, there is no doubt about it, is the kingdom of God. But one must also concede that non-Covenant little children are little children too! This, among other things, has given cause for many of the Presbyterian or Reformed Faith to say that *probably* all who die in infancy are in the kingdom of God. The Westminster Confession of Faith wisely leaves this probability open. For to go beyond this and to state without qualification that all who die in infancy are elect is to bind the consciences of men with that which Scripture leaves as indefinite.

Therefore it is merely our probable hope that we shall see in heaven every miscarried, stillborn, or even aborted infant, i.e., every infant who has ever died. Why? Because God is most gracious. Because the kingdom of God belongs to infants, little children and those who are like them. And yet Reformed people, i.e., Calvinists, even Presbyterians or Reformed stand accused of worshipping a God who damns little babies to Hell! Calvinists have been falsely accused of this for centuries! Thus the (earlier but repeated here) verse from Burns' *Holy Willie's Prayer*:

When frae my mither's womb I fell,
Thou might hae plungèd me in hell,
To gnash my gums, to weep and wail,
In burnin' lakes,
Where damnèd devils roar and yell,
Chain'd to their stakes...

Burns had a picture of little babies in hell "gnashing their gums!" But Jesus says, "Of such is the kingdom of God" and not, "Of such is the lake of fire!" Therefore we should be inclined to believe that all who die in infancy are probably saved. And that all children growing up in a Bible-believing Church are Christians until they prove themselves otherwise!

Search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. But as you do don't forget to treat the little children at your church the way the Lord treated them. For what Christian in his right mind would want to incur the Lord's *displeasure*? For it's the Lord's *pleasure* that little children receive the kingdom of God! Therefore: Let the little children come to Him. Don't try to forbid them.

Don't look upon the little children as if they are unbelievers. For that would be an insult to the little children. And we don't want to cause them to suffer. More to the point, nor do we want to insult the Lord Jesus Christ! To be sure, infants and little children need to be brought to Jesus like everyone else. Like the rest of us, they need to be constantly urged to repent and believe in the good news of Jesus Christ. But see how the Lord embraced them as if they were His own, i.e., as owners of His Kingdom. Therefore as opposed to the picture Burns' paints for us (above), instead let the following picture be burned into your mind and heart: "And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them." Mark 10:16.