

Sacraments in the New Testament

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The Tyndale New Testament Lecture, 1946.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Our Lord Jesus Christ hath knit together a company of new people by sacraments, most few in number, most easy to be kept, most excellent in signification.”¹

Augustine's estimate of the importance and meaning of sacraments has been widely held and influential ever since his day, and much can be said for it; but at first sight the phenomena of New Testament utterances on the subject do not seem quite accordant. In twenty out of twenty-one Epistles there is no reference to the Lord's Supper. Baptism is mentioned nineteen times in seven Epistles, but the remaining fourteen letters are silent on the theme. If we follow the generally accepted dating of New Testament documents, the first allusion to Baptism is one that has been regarded by some as strangely depreciatory (1 Cor. i. 14-17). That passage will be discussed later; but against its apparent slighting of Baptism we may set what is said in another Pauline letter little removed in time. In Romans vi the rite which in the Corinthian letter is not viewed as of supreme importance is employed as a proof and a picture of Christian salvation. Apart from specific references, however, we get abundant evidence in the New Testament that the rites so occasionally mentioned were generally observed and highly valued.² The incidental nature of the allusions to the sacraments need not connote any laxity in practice or any blindness to their worth. Indeed, their prevalence and customariness may well account for so little being said of them. What is universally accepted does not bulk largely in correspondence or conversation.³

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Augustine ascribes the place of the sacraments in the Church to our Lord (*Dominus... colligavit*) and implies that their office was appointed for them by the Head of the Church. The language of creeds and confessions ever since has taken the same tone. Article XXV of the Church of England three times uses the term “ordained of Christ” (a *Christo instituta*, or a *Christo Domino nostro in Evangelio instituta*). Article XXVIII appeals to what the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is “by Christ's ordinance” (*ex institutione Christi*). “The main point [of Baptism] rests on God's appointment,” says Luther's Larger Catechism, and the mind of the age of the Reformation speaks equally to the same effect in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 68), when it describes the two sacraments as “appointed by Christ in the New Testament” (*Christus*

¹ Augustine, *Epist.* 54: “Sacramentis numero paucissimis, observatione facillimis, significatione praestantissimis.”

² “In der christlichen Gemeinde ist die Taufe Zweifellos von Anfang an üblich gewesen” (Oepke, Art. βαπτίζω in Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch*). He cites Acts ii. 38, 41; viii. 12, etc.

³ “In the sayings of Jesus recorded in the Synoptic Gospels there is no explicit reference to God's love, though it appears frequently in the Gospel and First Epistle of John and in the letters of Paul, as well as in the Old Testament and contemporary Jewish writings” (A. C. McGiffert, *Christianity as History and Faith* [1934], p. 167). Yet who would argue from this fact that our Lord did not hold that God is love?

hat im neuen Testament eingesetzt). Calvin⁴ repeatedly speaks of the sacraments as commanded or given by God, and implies their Dominical institution in his metaphor of coined or uncoined silver: “the latter, impressed with the public stamp, becomes money and receives a new value.” So ordinary signs, when “inscribed with the word of God”, have a new form given to them. They begin to be what they previously were not. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (A. 92) defines a sacrament as “an holy ordinance instituted by Christ”. Quotations might be multiplied to show that the historic Church in all her branches has held the belief that the two rites of Baptism and Holy Communion derive their authority from the command of Christ.

Nor is this only a matter of the past. In *The Outline of a Reunion Scheme for the Church of England and the Evangelical Free Churches of England* (1938) it is said: “The united Church of England accepts the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion as of divine appointment, as means of grace, and as expressing the corporate life of the whole fellowship in and with Christ.” A note adds: “No one who believes that Jesus Christ commanded the disciples to baptize, or that His first disciples from the very beginning did so, could consent to any other rule of membership in His Church [than Baptism].” The Basis of Union of the United Church of Canada (which came into force on June 10, 1925) acknowledges “two sacraments, Baptism and

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the Lord’s Supper, which were instituted by Christ” (Article XVI).

The purpose of this recital of what is familiar and probably undisputed is to call attention to the enduring emphasis on the derivation of the Christian sacraments from the definite appointment of Christ Himself. It appears to be an integral part of the definition of sacraments of the gospel that they should not merely “originate in our need of them—which, is true but misleading here.... They are chosen for us, given to us; these rites of Baptism and Eucharist go back to Christ Himself. There is nothing older than this in Christendom; ... We take Bread and we take the Cup because the Redeemer himself is the fountain head of this living tradition. *Ipse Dominus fecit...* Protestantism has never even distantly denied that God’s power dwells in the sacraments in virtue of the Lord’s institution!”⁵

When, however, we turn to the New Testament, we find it to be a widely-held modern position that considerable doubt attaches to what were once taken to be unchallengeable records of a divine command to practise Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Discussions proceed among the Churches on the interpretation and administration of the sacraments, these matters being notoriously those which present greatest difficulties in the way of Christian unity. Ought not such questions to be subordinated, however, to the settlement of the issue as to the origination of the ordinances? Unless they can be rooted in the will of Christ, they must surely be relegated to the lower rank of ceremonies which each Church is at liberty to vary or omit.⁶ One way of avoiding this conclusion would be to find a sufficient ground for our observance of the two sacraments in the practice of the Church, considered as a sure interpretation of the mind of Christ in the matter. With the Council of Trent (Session IV, 8th April, 1546) we might include

⁴ *Inst.* iv. cap. 14.

⁵ J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (1941), Lecture VII, *passim*. Cf. F. Gavin in the S.P.C.K. *New Commentary* (1928), p. 395: “By sacrament we have come to understand a rite comprising ‘outward and visible signs’ by which is mediated ‘inward and spiritual grace’, and which claims Dominical authorization... The salient feature is the conviction that the transaction described as sacramental claims the sanction of Christ our Lord.”

⁶ Cf. Article XX: “The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies.”

sacramental theory and practice in the “unwritten traditions, which were received by the Apostles from the lips of Christ Himself”, which are to be received and venerated

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with an “equal pious affection and reverence” to that manifested towards the Scriptures. Even here, appeal is made ultimately to the will of our Lord, the evidence for which is discovered in unvarying usage or ecclesiastical tradition. Ecclesiastical tradition delivers those who can accept it from perplexities caused by critical challenges, but it brings other and greater problems when we realize how much error has thus been imported into Christian thought and action. If, then, with Protestantism generally, we take the Bible as “the only foundation and perfect rule of our faith”, we must either find therein authority for ascribing the sacraments to our Lord’s own institution, or we must cease to claim they are of His appointment.

The consequences of the second course of action are grave, and though truth is to be followed at all costs, those costs should be counted—otherwise the situation is not rightly judged. It would not necessarily follow that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper should be discontinued, but the reason for their performance would have essentially changed. The theological results would include the overthrow of Baptismal Regeneration, which could never be reasonably linked with a rite of entirely human origin; it would be equally impossible to interpret a sacred meal which had merely developed within the Church as carrying with it any “conversion of the whole substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of our Lord”. Many of us would count these theological gains, but there would be loss in the whole setting of the rites, which would appeal to our preference rather than to our obedience.⁷ They might be retained as a link with tradition, or because they picturesquely set forth the central tenets of our faith, but they could not without difficulty be made conditions of fellowship or used to determine the boundaries of communion.

So much has been said to justify a re-examination of New Testament statements concerning the origin of the sacraments. We claim that we may still name them “ordinances”, as being ordained for continual observance in His Church by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Though reference has been made to both Baptism and the

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Lord’s Supper, we propose to limit the discussion mainly to Baptism, for several reasons. For one thing, this is the point of fiercest attack, since the Pauline accounts of the Last Supper are earlier in date than the injunction to baptize given in the first Gospel. A further reason is mentioned by E. G. Selwyn in his recent Commentary on First Peter (pp. 361, 362): “One of the worst fruits of the Eucharistic controversies which have vexed the Western Church in recent centuries has been their tendency to distract men’s minds from the theology of baptism.”⁸ In a discussion of sacraments the initiating rite should surely receive initial attention.

⁷ “An eclectic attitude... cannot be claimed as a central allegiance to Christ, so much as a preference for Him” (*The Nature of the Church according to the Witness of the Society of Friends* [1945], p. 18).

⁸ Cf. also J. K. Mozley, *The Gospel Sacraments* (1933), p. 78.

II. THE COMMAND TO BAPTIZE

From earliest times the Church has believed that Christian Baptism can claim the express sanction of Christ's command in Matthew xxviii. 19. We need not now seek its origin in the realm of the mystery-religions, in view of the waning of interest in that supposed source. "The evidence for the existence of sacraments in the mystery-religions so early as St. Paul's time is very slight. Even of the rites of later times we know but little."⁹ "The belief in mystery influence is not needed to explain the Pauline thought or terminology."¹⁰

R. Reitzenstein suggested Mandaism as the source of Johannine Baptism and hence, indirectly, of the Christian rite. After the death of Christ a section of the Baptist's followers who did not accept Christianity regarded their dead leader John as the Messiah; they then united with the (previously existing) Mandaean sect, which had already influenced John.¹¹ Considerable doubt is now felt as to the existence of the Mandaean sect till much later times, and the elevation of the Baptist to a place of honour in their writings is assigned to the age of Mohammed.¹² F. C. Burkitt's judgment is that "Mandaism may be interesting

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in itself but it is useless to go to it as a key to unlock the mysteries of early Christian development."¹³

Probably the ordinance of Baptism derived its outward form from either Jewish proselyte Baptism or the rite observed by John the Baptist. It is possible that the latter observance differed from the former in being no longer self-administered but received at the hands of another, and this would explain his distinctive title "the Baptist". If so, an earlier ceremony received a deepening both by a change in outward form and (still more) by its association with repentance and the announcement of the imminence of the Kingdom of Heaven. To Johannine Baptism our Lord submitted, and this would naturally invest it with sacredness in the eyes of His followers.

From the commencement of the Church's history in the Acts of the Apostles we find Baptism occurring as a matter of course. A further deepening of meaning has, however, taken place, for while it is still the normal accompaniment of repentance it is now the expression of faith in Christ, and the baptized person is baptized into the divine Name. Most significantly, the reception of the rite is usually the occasion for an experience of the Holy Spirit. This can scarcely be a mere prolongation of Johannine Baptism, for we gather hints of the continuance of a party of John's disciples as in some sense rivals and critics of Christianity rival bodies do not usually cling to practices that are hard to distinguish from those of their antagonists. Nor is the post-Pentecostal practice of Christian Baptism likely to be but a continuation of such baptisms as are recorded in John iv. 1, 2, for the deeper theological associations referred to above (particularly in relation to the Holy Spirit) appear to demand something more than the preservation of an existing practice. The procedure of the disciples presupposes some definite

⁹ S. Cave, *The Gospel of St. Paul* (1928), p. 273.

¹⁰ H. G. Marsh, *The Origin and Significance of New Testament Baptism* (1941), pp. 139, 140.

¹¹ R. Reitzenstein, *Die Vorgeschichte der christlichen Taufe* (1929), p. 266. Almost immediately after its appearance, M. Dibelius, in a review of it, called attention to the ever-present doubt about chronology: *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 1931, Nr. 6, 128.

¹² Oepke, *op. cit.* p. 534.

¹³ *Journal of Theological Studies*, xxix (1928), pp. 225-235, quoted by Marsh, *op. cit.*, p. 15, n.1.

and authoritative word on the part of their Master, giving permanence and the force of a command to a rite familiar in its form but vitally altered in its meaning.

Such a word is to be found in Matthew xxviii. 19, but its authenticity has been widely denied. O. C. Quick wrote: "As a general conclusion from the historical controversies of the last half-century... we are no longer justified in resting the whole,

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or even the main, weight of the authority for the doctrine and practice of any sacrament upon the bare fact that the Bible attributes a particular form of words to Christ Himself."¹⁴ There is more in the matter than "a particular form of words", of course; the fact of divine appointment does not necessarily depend upon our possessing an exact verbatim report of our Lord's phrases. P. T. Forsyth¹⁵ held that Baptism was "instituted by the ascended Christ through the Apostles as His will for the Church", and that we should recognize that "the sacraments are valid, not chiefly because they were instituted by the command of Christ, but because they arise from the nature of His gospel in the Church. And there is nothing in that gospel that prescribes but two, or fetters the discretion of the Church in the matter". Undoubtedly, every Christian regards the sacraments as congruous with the nature of the gospel, otherwise he would disuse them. Correspondence is not the same thing as origin, however, and it can scarcely be questioned that the sacraments have continued to be observed for centuries because of the persuasion of Christians that they are divinely commanded. As previously argued, a rite resting upon an inference from "the nature of His gospel in the Church" cannot reasonably have attached to it the significance and importance which Baptism has historically possessed. What has been a fixed requirement would become optional and vague (as the last words cited from Forsyth show). That may be a necessary change, but we cannot disguise from ourselves the magnitude of it. It would in time transform the whole theory and practice of sacraments.

The problems connected with the Matthaean passage may be grouped thus:—

- (1) The citations of the verse in a shorter form by Eusebius have suggested that his shortened form represents an earlier and better text.
- (2) The absence of Synoptic parallels is said to make the authenticity of the command uncertain.
- (3) The Trinitarian theology of verse 20 is held to be too advanced to be possible on the lips of our Lord at this stage.
- (4.) 1 Cor. i. 17 is thought to be inconsistent with such a commission.

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- (5) The Early Church baptized "into the Name of Jesus" rather than into the Triune Name.
- (6) The universality of the Commission ("all nations") may be an indication of a later development.

¹⁴ *The Christian Sacraments*, pp. 118, 119.

¹⁵ *The Church and the Sacraments*, pp. 185-186, n. 1.

When several objections are thus grouped together, they may make an unfair impression on the mind. We may regard a number of caveats as having cumulative force. This is hardly the case with the list of objections just recited. Some question the wording of the narrative, others dispute the entire event. They are heterogeneous and lack relatedness to one another. They are not links which form a chain, for the links are disconnected. This consideration does not dispose of them, but it means that no one of them ought, without further consideration, to be regarded as multiplying the probability or as strengthening the force of the others. Each objection should be judged by itself.

1. The well-known variation in the citation of the Matthaean passage in Eusebius has been widely discussed, and present-day writers appear to have abandoned the objection. C. J. Cadoux¹⁶ dismisses the matter in a footnote to the effect that the Eusebian reading is “probably incorrect”. The subject is introduced here to show the impressiveness of the textual evidence in favour of our present text of Matt. xxviii. 19. Manuscripts, versions and patristic citations display a harmony which is only emphasized by the one writer whose quotations are discordant. Briefly, the facts are that in a number of passages Eusebius gives this form of the verse : “Go and make disciples of all the nations *in My name*” The Trinitarian phrase and the injunction to baptize are thus omitted. The Eusebian citations of the text in the shortened form are twenty-one in number, against four quotations in the ordinary form, but the authorship of two of the writings containing the fuller phrase has been questioned. In another case the fuller form has been attributed to a Syriac translator. If the four ordinary quotations are by Eusebius himself, they occur in his later writings.¹⁷ Lawlor and Oulton, in their edition of the *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Martyrs of Palestine*,¹⁸ give the result of their special study of Eusebius’s methods of quotations. They do not deal with Biblical quotations, but in respect to indirect

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quotations they conclude that Eusebius “trusted overmuch to a remarkably retentive memory, which on occasions played him tricks”. In regard to direct quotations, instances are given (*e.g.* from passages where Josephus and Philo are cited) where the quotation begins or ends in the middle of a sentence, sometimes with resulting loss of intelligibility. “Now and again he leaves out elsewhere a portion of the text without giving notice to his readers that he has done so.” “It is reasonable to suppose that many mutilations, still undetected, lurk in the more numerous extracts which we know only from transcripts in the History. This conclusion detracts somewhat seriously from the value of Eusebius’s quotations from early writers.” Lawlor and Oulton suggest the hypothesis that Eusebius left to scribes the duty of filling in quotations. “In the result we cannot acquit him of the charge of careless writing. The most retentive of memories will lead a historian into mistakes, if it is not constantly checked by reference to the documents; and the work of the most careful scribes should not be published without collation with the originals from which they were copied.”

It might, however, be contended that this judgment on Eusebian quotation-methods would scarcely apply to the case under discussion, where the recurrence of the variant is persistent. Eusebius is not, however, absolutely uniform in his variation from the ordinary reading. “The facts are in summary that Eusebius quotes Matthew xxviii. 19 twenty-one times, either omitting everything between ἔθνη and δισάσκοντες, or in the form πορευθέντες

¹⁶ *The Historic Mission of Jesus* (1941), pp. 309f., n. 5.

¹⁷ Cf. Kirsopp Lake, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ii, 380.

¹⁸ Vol. ii (1928), pp. 19-27.

μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι μου, διδάσκοντες κτλ, the latter form being the more frequent.”¹⁹ If Eusebius could omit the phrase “in My Name” on occasion, when the words were not necessary to his purpose, his omission of the reference to baptism may be similarly explained. In any case, his characteristically loose way of quoting is again illustrated.

F. H. Chase²⁰ divides the twenty-one cases where Eusebius gives the shorter text into two classes, four of which (*Demonstratio Evangelica* i. 3, i. 4, i. 6, iii. 6) omit the clause since it is not relevant to the subject under treatment. Chrysostom, who was certainly familiar with the full text in its traditional form, similarly omits the words about Baptism when the context does

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not require them. The second group of seventeen passages includes a case (*Dem. Ev.* iii. 7) where Eusebius comments especially on the words “In My Name”. Riggenbach would derive the words from Luke xxiv. 47 (“that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name”) and Chase thinks the words may be due to “harmonization”, or “an eccentric reading peculiar and due to Eusebius himself”.

In any case, the absence of variations in all the existing MSS. and versions which contain the verses at all seems to be decisive proof that the command to baptize forms part of the original text. Chase shows that the words are quoted by Irenaeus (*adv. haer.* in. 17.1—in Latin, however); Hippolytus (*contra Noetum* 14); Tertullian (*de bapt.* 13; *de praesc. haer.* 20); and probably the *Didaché* (ch. vii; cf. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, i, 207, n. 5). It would be an extraordinary thing, if the Eusebian shorter reading had really formed part of the true text, that all other evidence for it should have disappeared. “All the surviving Greek codices were not produced by a band of conspirators. They grew up naturally in different portions of the Greek-speaking Church. An interpolation could not thus be foisted into the text of the Gospels, and all evidence of its true character be obliterated.”²¹

2. As to the absence of Synoptic parallels, admittedly we cannot use Mark xvi. 16 in view of the uncertainty attaching to it, and the alternative endings to Mark contain no reference to Baptism. Streeter infers that Matthew’s copy of Mark did not include any account of the final Commission “because Matthew does not mention Peter and because his narrative becomes exceptionally vague at the exact point where the authentic text of Mark now ends”. Yet Streeter does not altogether exclude an indirect link between the present Matthaean and the original Marcan ending, for he says: “The end of Matthew is exactly the kind of conclusion we should expect if the first man who took a copy of the mutilated Gospel to Antioch had written down on the back of the last sheet his recollections of the substance of what he had been told at Rome the lost conclusion had once contained.”²² The farewell charge reported in Luke xxiv. 44-49 mentions a commission to preach repentance in Christ’s Name

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unto all nations with a view to forgiveness of sins. Though Baptism is not mentioned, there are underlying similarities in the reference to “the Name” and the universal destination of the message. There is still force in Denney’s saying:— “In all its forms the commission has to do

¹⁹ Lake, *op. cit.*

²⁰ *Journal of Theological Studies*, vi (1905), pp. 481-521.

²¹ Chase, *op. cit.*

²² *The Four Gospels*, pp. 343 and 358.

either with Baptism (so in Matthew and Mark) or with the remission of sins (so in Luke and John). These are but two forms of the same thing, for in the world of New Testament ideas Baptism and the remission of sins are inseparably associated.”²³ That remark, however, whilst admirably proving that Baptism is cognate with the gospel, does not establish a command by Christ for its continual observance.

We are told that the first Gospel in its present form was “written about A.D. 85 at Antioch in Syria” and that the author’s “historical authority, as distinct from his sources, is decidedly low, for he constantly evinces a willingness to abandon historical accuracy in the interests of edification”.²⁴ It is obviously impossible here to enter into the whole question of the general credibility of the first Evangelist: probably each student of his work would judge differently on individual points. This particular objection will be better left, therefore, until we have considered others and also given weight to some supporting pieces of evidence. If, after pondering these, we conclude that they add nothing to corroborate the statements in Matthew xxviii. 19, those statements will remain unproved, but not therefore disproved. On the other hand, if we judge that the Evangelist’s record here has reliability, we may ask ourselves whether the judgment ought not to be modified which ascribes to him more care for edification than for historical accuracy.

We may, however, add the suggestion that criticism does not always reject passages which represent the only Biblical account of the matter. The *Pericope Adulterae* (John vii. 53-viii. 11) is omitted by our oldest uncial MSS. with the exception of D, and by other authorities is inserted in St. Luke’s Gospel. Yet it is almost universally accepted, for it “bears upon the face of it marks of authentic history”.²⁵ If Matthew xxviii. 19 is rejected, in spite of its having much stronger textual support, may it not be due to subjectivity of judgment? What is there of self-evident-

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cing quality in the Pericope which is lacking in the Matthaean verses? The character of Jesus in each case is consistent with what we otherwise know of Him. “Even where a saying occurs once only, we can compare it with what we otherwise know of the teaching of Jesus and form an opinion of its genuineness.”²⁶ P. A. Micklem²⁷ claims that the saying under discussion “has affinities both in style and contents with the great utterance of Matthew xi. 25-30.... It has a similar Hebraic, majestically rhythmical form²⁸; its sentences fall into a single stanza... Again, the earlier saying, as this, includes a claim of universal authority (*cf.* xi. 27a); it includes also a command (xi. 28a, 29a) coupled with an assurance (28b, 29b, ff.). Further, the former saying, as this, includes a revelation of the mutual relations of Father and Son, and those of man to God (xi. 27). Thus both sayings contain elements which link them rather with the later and more developed teaching of the fourth Gospel than with the general outlook and character of Matthew”. This comparison in tone of Matthew xxviii. 16-20 with xi. 25-30 is somewhat

²³ *Death of Christ* (1902), p. 73.

²⁴ C. J. Cadoux, *Historic Mission of Jesus*, p. 22.

²⁵ C. J. Wright, *The Mission and Message of Jesus* (1937), p. 794.

²⁶ Vincent Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (1935), p. 113.

²⁷ *Westminster Commentary on Matthew* (1917), *ad loc.*

²⁸ In *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (1946), p. 46, Matthew Black notes as an Aramaic usage the paratactic imperative without a connecting particle (which is the Bezan reading here); he is doubtful, however, whether in this place it can be described as non-Greek. He speaks also of πορεύεσθε (which in the plural Codex Bezae also shows here) as one of the “characteristic Semitic auxiliaries”.

favourable to its authenticity (especially in view of the fact that Matthew xi. 25-30 has a parallel in Luke x. 20-22).

B. H. Streeter felt that “Matthew’s account of the Resurrection appearances... is extremely meager”.²⁹ Has sufficient account, however, been taken of one vivid detail in Matthew xxviii. 17, 18? “They worshipped Him... some doubted... Jesus *came* (προσελθών, Moffatt: *came forward*) and spoke.” The verb προσέρχομαι is one of Matthew’s favourite words, occurring more often in the first Gospel than in all the rest of the New Testament put together (53 instances against 39) 31 of the 53 instances are uses of the aorist participle, as here; only two out of the 53 are other than aorist tenses. We may compare a similar event in Matthew’s story of the Transfiguration (Matthew xvii. 6, 7), where the disciples “fell on their faces and were sore afraid. And

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Jesus *came* (προσῆλθεν) and touched them”, and spoke to them. In each case Jesus ministers to the disturbed mind of His followers, drawing near so as to give fuller assurance, and adding a word to His deed. It is in “the manner of the Master”, and conveys to the mind of one reader at least the impression of actuality, of something quite unlikely to have been invented.

3. “Very possibly the Trinitarian formula is a reflection back into the narrative of the practice of the early church,” says T. H. Robinson³⁰ and adds, “but there is no need to doubt the essence of the command.” The question as to whether we have here a precise formula to be rigidly adhered to in Baptism will be discussed later, but even if we insist on claiming that this is a verbatim report of our Lord’s speech, we need see nothing of insuperable difficulty in the emergence of Trinitarian teaching here. The occasion called for teaching in advance of what had gone before, and the passage does not stand entirely alone. “The earlier apostolic teaching presupposes the doctrine, and, indeed, in more than one instance gives it explicit shape.”³¹ Similar teaching is implied in John xiv. 23-26; xvii. 26. Especially noteworthy is the Trinitarian implication of the commission and promise recorded in Luke xxiv. 49. H. M. Scott³² notes that the Trinitarian formula “occurs in the most Jewish Gospel, where such teachings are improbable except from Jesus”, and that Luke xxiv. 49 combined with Acts i. 5 comprises “the same elements of doctrine as are contained in Matthew xxviii. 19”. Even if the Trinitarian reference were deleted, the possibility of a direct command to baptize would not be disproved, though we should no longer have Christ’s *ipsissima verba*.

4. J. V. Bartlett³³ held that if Paul had known of a divine injunction to baptize, he could not have written in 1 Cor. i. 17: “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” The words, however, may well be read as setting two tasks in the order of their relative importance; it does not follow that the secondary task is not, equally with the first, a matter of divine command. The idiom by which comparison is stated in terms of negation is

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²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 343.

³⁰ *Moffatt Commentary on Matthew* (1928), *in loc.*

³¹ Micklem, *op. cit.*, *in loc.*, who refers to 1 Cor. xii. 4-6; 2 Cor. xiii. 14; Eph. iv. 4-6; 1 Peter i. 2; 1 John iii. 23f.

³² *Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible*, v. 313.

³³ *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ii, 376.

one that occurs elsewhere in the New Testament (Mark ix. 37 Luke x. 20; John xv. 16; 1 Cor. vii. 10).³⁴

Moreover, the concluding words of the verse in question deserve attention. Why does Paul, after saying, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel,” add the words “not in wisdom of speech, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect”? They do not apparently arise out of anything previously mentioned, and may well be a parallel clause in which the Apostle is still pursuing his main line of thought. “Wisdom of speech” is an over-emphasis on expression that might nullify the fact to be expressed, *i.e.* “the cross of Christ”, exactly as an over-emphasis on Baptism might hinder the proclamation of the gospel. No one would argue from these words of Paul to an entire disuse of speech, but only its proper subordination as means to an end; we should not otherwise interpret the earlier part of the verse, in which Baptism is placed in apparent opposition to evangelization. Paul deprecates the exaltation of expression above meaning, of rite above gospel, of symbol above what is symbolized. In view of Paul’s tendency to associate others with himself wherever possible the use here of the singular (“me”) is significant. He is laying down no law for others, but stating the circumstances of his own call, which cannot be taken as contradicting the charge given to “the Eleven”—though even in their commission “Baptism” is introduced subordinately as part of the “making of disciples”. That Paul preferred to concentrate on the work of preaching, leaving the administration of Baptism to others, is in line with the similar action of Peter (Acts x. 48). Streeter and Appasamy³⁵ report that Sadhu Sundar Singh found it expedient to give up baptizing his own converts. An Indian missionary of my own acquaintance (the Rev. F. W. Jarry, B.M.S., of Orissa) said that for twenty-five years he had ceased to baptize, to avoid the suggestion of superiority to native ministers, and also to discountenance the idea that Christianity is a European religion.³⁶ Analogous motives may well have influenced the Apostle Paul, and may throw light on the statement

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in John iv. 2 that it was not Jesus Himself who used to baptize, but His disciples.³⁷ All these considerations taken together seem to counteract the suggestion that 1 Cor. i. 17 is a disproof of the commission to baptize attributed to our Lord in Matthew xxviii. 19.

5. It has been argued that if the Church knew herself to have received her Lord’s command to baptize into the Name of the Trinity, it is curious that in the cases of Baptism referred to in Acts and in the Pauline writings a shorter form using only the name of Christ is employed (*cf.* Acts ii. 38 and x. 48, ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; Acts viii. 16 and xix. 5, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ; Gal. iii. 27, εἰς Χριστόν; Rom. vi. 3 εἰς Χριστόν Ἰησοῦν). We are told that “the obvious explanation of the silence of the New Testament on the Triune Name, and the use of another formula in Acts and by Paul, is that this other formula was the earlier, and that the Triune formula is a later addition. It would require very strong arguments to controvert this presumption, and none seems to exist.”³⁸

³⁴ *Cf.* Cadoux, *op. cit.*, p. 202, n. 2, where idiomatic usages similar to this are shown to be numerous in the Bible.

³⁵ *The Sadhu* (1921), pp. 38, 39.

³⁶ Paul’s refusal (to baptize converts) may simply have been his way of safeguarding “the crown rights of the Redeemer” (H. T. Andrews, in Forsyth’s *The Church and the Sacraments*, p. 147).

³⁷ The comment of Godet on John iv. 2 still deserves consideration: “By Leaving the Baptism of water to the Apostles, He rendered the rite independent of His presence and so provided for the maintenance of it in His Church after His departure” (quoted by Marcus Dods in *Expositor’s Greek Testament*, *ad. loc.*).

³⁸ Lake, *op. cit.*, ii, 380.

If stress is laid on the use of the Triune Name of our Lord as fixing a formula, the careful and accurate repetition of which was necessary to the validity of Baptism, it is certainly difficult to understand the varying practice of the early Church. It can be said, however, that the insistence upon such a ritual formula is a phenomenon which has no affinity with anything else we know of Jesus. Rentdorff³⁹ urges that there is at least a possibility of seeing in these baptismal phrases not the citation of a ritual Formula but a technical term for the concept “Christian Baptism”. He also refers to the loose fashion in which the New Testament cites the constituent parts of the Decalogue, the words spoken at the Last Supper, and the Lord’s Prayer. It has been suggested that Matt. xxviii. 19 implies the idea of incorporation into the divine name, or passing into the ownership of Him whose name it is. “He is not here prescribing a formula” but “plainly

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revealing the spiritual meaning of the outward and visible rite”.⁴⁰ Moulton and Milligan⁴¹ give instances from the papyri where εἰς [τὸ] ὄνομα τινός is used of payments made “to the account of anyone”. Oepke⁴² says the formula εἰς τὸ ὄνομα is demonstrated as a technical term of Hellenistic banking business, meaning “*auf das Konto*” (“to the credit of”); “the account bears the name of the owner, and in Baptism the Name of Christ is by baptizer, baptized or both, uttered, invoked and known.” Deissmann⁴³ quotes an inscription (*CIG.* ii, No. 2693 *e*), not later than the beginning of the imperial period, which records the purchase of various objects by the κτηματῶναι εἰς τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ [Zeus] ὄνομα. “The person in question, in this connection, is only the nominal purchaser, who represents the real purchaser, *i.e.* the Deity; the κτηματῶνης εἰς τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ὄνομα is the *fidéicommissaire du domaine sacré*.... Just as, in the Inscription, *to buy into the name of God* means *to buy so that the article bought belongs to God*, so also the idea underlying, *e.g.*, the expressions *to baptize into the name of the Lord*, or *to believe into the name of the Son of God*, is that baptism or faith constitutes the *belonging* to God or to the Son of God.”

The above evidence seems to establish the possibility of an interpretation of the phrase “into the Name” which would emphasize its meaning rather than its importance as a formula requiring accurate citation. It is in favour of this that Gal. iii. 17 and Romans vi. 3 do not use ὄνομα. Moreover, in 1 Cor. i, 12-15, Paul seems clearly to argue that the only justification for anyone saying, Ἐγὼ εἶμι Παύλου (“I belong to Paul”—Moffatt’s translation) would be that he had been baptized εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Παύλου. On this interpretation, the use of the one name instead of the Triune Name would be explained by saying that “Baptism in the name of Jesus is really in the name of the Trinity”.⁴⁴ So Calvin wrote : “Because Jesus is the substance, the Scripture says that we are properly baptized in His Name.”⁴⁵ That such a variation between the One Name and the Triune

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³⁹ *Die Taufe im Urchristentum im Lichte der neueren Forschungen* (1905), p. 43, n. 2.

⁴⁰ Chase, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, s. v. ὄνομα.

⁴² Kittel : *Theologisches Wörterbuch*, Art. βαπτίζω.

⁴³ *Bible Studies*, pp. 146f.

⁴⁴ *HDB.* i, 245.

⁴⁵ *Confession of Faith in the Name of the Reformed Churches of France*, 562, sec. 26—in *Tracts*, vol. ii, p. 154.

form was possible is shown by the fact that the Didaché uses the Matthaean words in ch. vii and the shorter phrase” baptized into the name of the Lord” in ch. ix.⁴⁶

We suggest, then, that the evidence is indecisive as to whether our Lord used the exact phrase reported in Matthew xxviii. 19. But even were it finally proved that we have not here Christ’s *ipsissima verba*, we may still have His intention correctly reported. To assume that the Trinitarian phrase is the reflection backwards of later theology does not justify the further assumption that the command to baptize is also the product of a later age—unless we adopt the impossibly rigid canon that inexactitude in one point means unreliability in everything. A poor verbal memory does not necessarily prevent one being a faithful witness.

6. If on this unforgettable occasion the disciples had received from their Lord a command to preach the gospel to “all the nations”, how are we to account for their hesitation about the Gentile mission? Do not the words suggest a later stage of development? This argument affects the command to baptize, since it attacks the credibility of the whole report in Matt. xxviii. 19. Streeter⁴⁷ regards the words as Matthew’s attempt to counteract the prohibition to preach to Gentiles and Samaritans in Matt. x. 5. What is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, however, is not that the Apostles were fettered by any conception of the restriction of the gospel to the Jewish race, but that the problem rather was as to how far circumcision was to be required of Gentile converts.⁴⁸ Even Judaism could entertain the thought of “compassing sea and land” to make proselytes, and it is not probable that the followers of Christ would have been narrower in mind and spirit. In Acts x. 45 it is “they *of the circumcision*” who are

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amazed “because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost”; at that stage these converts lacked even Baptism, though that was required of the proselyte. The Apostles frequently failed at once to realize the meaning and obligation of their Lord’s words, but when the Gentile mission began, the one question raised is not as to any national limitation but rather as to the ritual conditions to be imposed upon the Gentile believers.

III. NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING AND PRACTICE

The refutation of these objections one by one may not be felt indubitably to establish the authenticity of the commission to baptize. For instance, there is still the difficulty of those who share the viewpoint represented by C. J. Cadoux.⁴⁹ He discusses whether we can believe that Jesus “prescribed any sacramental rites to be observed” by members of His Church. He thinks it credible that Jesus “should have pictured them living together, treasuring His memory,

⁴⁶ G. F. Moore suggested that the divergence of phrase may be due to the different previous beliefs of Jew and Gentile. “Jewish believers may well have deemed it {the Trinitarian formula} the most appropriate for the reception of Gentile converts, who confessed their faith in the one true God, the Father, and in His Son, the Messiah, and in the Holy Spirit of inspiration in the society of believers and particularly in their prophets. Baptism into the name of Jesus Christ (the Messiah), or of the Lord Jesus, was sufficient in the case of Jews or Samaritans, who had no need to profess monotheism” (*Judaism*, i [1927], pp. 188f.).

⁴⁷ *The Four Gospels*, pp. 295 n., 554.

⁴⁸ “There was at no time any thought of a gospel for Jews only. Paul’s new light on the matter concerned procedure only, as he himself says in Rom. xi. 25ff. (quoting Isaiah lix. 20)” (C. C. Torrey, *Our Translated Gospels*, p. xxvi).

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 307-310.

watching for His return, loyally observing His precepts and defending His claims”, but that “wearied by the strain and tension of His enterprise, immersed in the struggle against the manifold temptations that beset Him, and appalled by the prospect of defeat and death, He should have had the leisure and detachment to prescribe details of organization and procedure for His group of followers after His death, is inherently far less likely and less easily credible “. The whole judgment of likelihood is here obviously coloured by the picture drawn of Christ. We can point to details in the narrative of the passion which suggest that our Lord was not so “immersed in the struggle” as to be oblivious of the needs of others,⁵⁰ and such a declaration of future triumph as is given in Mark xiv. 62 (“the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven”) does not seem to fit one “appalled by the prospect of defeat and death”. Whatever we think of this description of Christ as “appalled by the prospect of defeat and death”, it cannot apply to the post-Resurrection period, and it is in that period that Matthew places the command to baptize.

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In any case it is evident from 1 Cor. xi. 23 *et seq.* that Paul, on entering the Christian Church only a few years after the Ascension, found that Church practising sacramental rites in obedience to what was reported as the express command of Christ.

Any supporter of the passage at the conclusion of the first Gospel has to meet the prejudice against it arising from the low value assigned to that Gospel as a historical document. To quote C. J. Cadoux again⁵¹: “In Matthew we find sayings ascribed to Jesus, not on the basis of some early and satisfactory record, but because the experience and needs of the Evangelist’s contemporaries led him to regard them as an edifying expression of what all imagined must have been the Lord’s meaning... Sayings (particularly post-Resurrection sayings) which have exclusively Matthaean attestation, and which furthermore reflect a different order of thought from that which we know on much better authority to have been customary with Jesus, are not supported by evidence strong enough to warrant our accepting them as historically-genuine, though of course they may still be religiously true and of great spiritual value.”

Within the limits of this paper it is obviously impossible to discuss so important an issue. But though the saying of Jesus recorded in the closing verses of St. Matthew has “exclusively Matthaean attestation”, the situation it presupposes has considerable other New Testament support, which suggests that the Evangelist and his contemporaries were not merely imagining what “must have been the Lord’s meaning”. In other words, the Matthaean statement that the Lord gave a command to baptize has the support of the fact that *the practice of the Church from the earliest days is inexplicable without such a command*. The narrative of a document which criticism dates about A.D. 85 has the attestation of a doctrine and custom which goes back to the date of St. Paul’s conversion, say A.D. 33. The basis for this assertion is as follows:—

1. From the beginning the language concerning Baptism tends to fall into the tone of the imperative. It is not commended as a fitting act, but universally required.⁵² Philip’s interpretation of

⁵⁰ Cf. Luke xxiii. 34, 42, 43; John xviii. 8; xix. 26.

⁵¹ *op. cit.*, p. 317.

⁵² “Whereas at the present time many people find no difficulty in the thought of an unbaptized Christian, such a person would have appeared as a contradiction in terms in the Apostolic Age” (J. K. Mozley, *op. cit.*, p. 60)

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Isaiah liii to the Ethiopian eunuch is styled “a preaching of the good news about Jesus” (Acts viii. 35); immediately the listener sees water by the wayside, he raises the question of Baptism, and is baptized. It is not unpardonable fancy to suggest that the knowledge of our Lord’s obedience to his vocation as God’s Suffering Servant quickened the desire of this one who heard it for the first time to comply with any clear command of Christ’s, hence his request for baptism. This early Gentile baptism is performed in the context of obedience, and that has been the fitting accompaniment of the ordinance ever since.

In 1 Cor. x. 1-4 St. Paul finds an analogy with Baptism in the Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea, whereby they were “all baptized unto Moses”. In 1 Peter iii. 19ff. Baptism is an “anti-type” of Noah’s Ark. But the crossing of the Red Sea and the entrance of Noah and his family into the Ark were actions running counter to human inclination and judgment, yet (according to the narrative) performed in consequence of a specific command by God. Can those who viewed such happenings as analogous with Baptism have assigned a lower authority to it?

Throughout the New Testament we discern no consciousness that the immersion of believers was their own spontaneous act, a self-chosen rite which in their judgment fittingly expressed their new attitude to Christ, nor is it based on a decision of the leaders of the Church to conserve a familiar procedure. The paucity of reference to John the Baptist in the Epistles tells against its having been a mere perpetuation of Johannine baptism. Rightly or wrongly, it seems clear from the New Testament records that the Church believed herself to be doing the will of her Lord. Though the Matthaean saying is not quoted, the action of the early Church is consistent with its validity and serves to corroborate it.

2. Baptism was retained for all, though Circumcision lost its obligatory nature, the latter act not being required of Gentile believers after the so-called “Council of Jerusalem” (Acts xv. 28, 29). Circumcision was an act which the Jew regarded as commanded by his God⁵³; the rite which inherited its supremacy can hardly have been viewed as having less authority. In Cobsians ii. ~ i Baptism and Circumcision are compared to show

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the superiority of the Christian rite, or rather, the experience which underlies it, which is significantly said to be “of Christ”. The additional phrase ἀχειροποιήτω, “not made with hands,” makes it clear that more than the external rite of Baptism is in the mind of Paul, but he immediately turns to speak of Baptism, and his whole comparison favours the view that for him, at any rate (in common., we may judge, with the whole Church of his day), Baptism had an authority higher than could be claimed for Circumcision. This, however, again harmonizes with the view of Matthew xxviii. 19 that it was instituted by Christ.

3. Of recent years much study has been given to the relationship which is strongly evidenced in the New Testament between the experience of Baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit. “What the primitive Church sought was not a rite but an experience—the fulfilment of the promise of the Spirit.”⁵⁴ There are two unusual instances in Acts x and xix, which really emphasize the connection between the rite and the experience. In the first case, Peter argues from the reception of the Spirit to the propriety of Baptism; in the latter case, Paul anticipates

⁵³ Acts vii. 8: “He [God] gave him the covenant of Circumcision”.

⁵⁴ H. G. Marsh, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

that a really Christian Baptism will be accompanied by the bestowal of the Spirit. The close connection between the two experiences is indicated in the passages which contrast the water-baptism of John with the “baptism with the Holy Spirit” which is the work of Christ.⁵⁵ It is not that the gift of the Spirit is conditioned upon Baptism, but that Baptism affords the fitting occasion for it, and the one was so generally linked with the other that Paul is surprised when at Ephesus he fails to find them together. In this “Paul was following the current doctrine of the Church”.⁵⁶ How did the Church arrive at that doctrine? It has been suggested that the prevalence of such evidences of the coming of the Spirit as *glossolalia*, commonly manifested on baptismal occasions, provided the basis for the doctrine.⁵⁷ We do not need to decide that point; it is sufficient for our purpose to point out that here is further proof that the early Church must have

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regarded Baptism as her Lord’s will for her, since it is incredible that it could be believed that the divine gift of the Spirit would be so closely linked with action that had no divine authorization.

4. In a lecture on *The Theology of Confirmation in relation to Baptism* (delivered in Oxford in January, 1946) Dom Gregory Dix makes a suggestion which, if it were accepted, might appear to add a further bridge across the gulf separating the beginnings of the Church and our earliest documents. He claims “that the Apostolic *paradosis* of practice, like the Apostolic *paradosis* of doctrine, is something which actually ante-dates the writing of the New Testament documents themselves by some two or three decades.... All I would say is that the liturgical tradition can be shewn to be older in some of its main elements than the New Testament Scriptures, and that down to the end of the second century, at least, it was regarded as having an ‘Apostolic’ authority of its own independently of them” (*op. cit.*, pp. 9, 10). He employs for his argument primarily the *Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus, claiming that it represents the practice at Rome in the later second century, and that the rite of Initiation which it describes must be of much older standing. Indeed, he thinks some of its features “are not easily explicable except as an inheritance from before the separation of the Church from the Synagogue in the early apostolic age itself” (*op. cit.*, p. 11). One who, like myself, possesses no liturgical scholarship is unequipped to discuss all these issues, yet certainly considerable objection would arise if it were proposed to give a liturgical tradition, based on a third-century document, *co-ordinate* authority with the New Testament. On the other hand there seems to be no reason for refusing to accept such a tradition as *corroborative*. Certainly the rite of Initiation which Dorn Gregory Dix discovers in his sources strongly confirms the New Testament evidence as to the association of the Holy Spirit with Baptism; the rite is a Baptism not of water only, but also of the Spirit. Indeed, he claims that the Baptism which is “generally necessary to salvation” would have been understood by primitive believers as Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The later separation of Baptism from Confirmation he traces to a forgetfulness of this early teaching. He affirms strongly “the teaching of the New Testament that Baptism in the Spirit is *not* Baptism in water, but something else which follows closely upon it”.

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⁵⁵ Acts i. 5. Cf. also Titus iii. 5, and particularly Acts ii. 38.

⁵⁶ H. G. Marsh, *op. cit.*, p. 537.

⁵⁷ L. T. Hodgson refers to “the probability of the view that the association of the gift of the Spirit with Baptism was largely due to the ecstatic behaviour of converts as they emerged from the baptismal waters” (*Doctrine of the Trinity* [1943], p. 52).

5. The so-called “Christ-mysticism” of St. Paul, the teaching that the baptized believer dies with Christ, is buried with Him, and with Him rises to “newness of life”,⁵⁸ is by many theologians to-day regarded as indicating more than mere symbolism. W. Heitmüller⁵⁹ insists that Rom. vi is not to be regarded as a mere picture of Christian experience, but that the new status of the baptized person is effected and conditioned by his Baptism. “Baptism is a sacramental action, that is, an action which operates, not *ex opere operantis*, but *ex opere operato*, in the Catholic sense.”⁶⁰ In the words of Rentdorff, “All that makes the Christian a Christian—the washing away of the stain of sin, the freedom from hostile powers which rule in the world, the imparting of the Spirit, the dedication to God and passing into His ownership, the union with the crucified and risen Christ, the personal experience of His death and resurrection, the incorporation into His mystical body, the Church—all this Baptism in reality effects.”⁶¹

The subject is beyond our present concern, but if the claims are valid of those who assign to Paul’s teaching on Baptism a sacramental connotation, will it not be apparent that the Apostle must have regarded the rite as possessing unquestionable divine authorization? Those who deny a merely symbolical meaning in Baptism call attention to such passages as Ephesians iv. 4-6 and v. 26, and point out that the functions which Baptism discharges are of primary importance. “It cleanses from the defilement of sin (1 Cor. vi. 11; Eph. v. 26). It creates the mystical union between the believer and Christ (Romans vi. 3; Gal. iii. 27) and is the means by which he is incorporated into the Church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. xii. 13).”⁶² All these functions seem to demand that, in the mind of the Apostle who claims them for Baptism, the ordinance held far higher rank than that of a ceremony felt by the Church to be an appropriate expression of truth or an edifying custom.

6. References to Baptism are scarce in other New Testament writers, but 1 Peter is regarded by E. G. Selwyn, the latest

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commentator on the Epistle, as having many allusions to the ordinance, and he thinks it highly probable that underlying the Epistle there are catechetical forms and patterns, both oral and written, which were used in the instruction of those about to be or already baptized.⁶³ He dates the letter in A.D. 63 or the first half of A.D. 64 and finds further traces of the catechetical teaching in other New Testament writings. Much of this evidence is inferential in character, but it justifies Dr. Selwyn’s claim that for Peter Baptism was “of central importance” (p. 327) and that this was a feature common to the whole of the early Church. Such centrality could scarcely be assigned to any rite other than one originating in the divine will; we infer, therefore, that St. Peter so regarded it, though he makes no overt statement to that effect. If Matthew xxviii. was a reliable account of what occurred, Peter was an eyewitness.

⁵⁸ Rom. vi. 3 *et seq.*

⁵⁹ *Taufe und Abendmahl bei Paulus* (1911), pp. 9ff.

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 14, as quoted by Rentdorff, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁶¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 15. Cf. also H. T. Andrews, “The Place of Sacraments in the Teaching of St. Paul,” contributed to P. T. Forsyth’s book, *The Church and the Sacraments* (1917).

⁶² Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁶³ *First Epistle of St. Peter* (1946), pp. 18, 363-466.

We thus meet again the fact previously emphasized, that the whole situation of the early Church, so far as it is known to us, is accordant with the hypothesis that in her administration of Baptism she conceived herself to be obeying an express command of her Lord. Allowance should be made for the large element of commanded actions in the Judaism in which the first disciples had been nurtured. H. Wheeler Robinson says,⁶⁴ “Whatever the historical origin of particular laws, their ultimate ascription to deity, *when taken seriously*, sets the divine *will* in the foreground.” He regards what he calls “the volitional aspect of the ethics and religion of Israel” as a strongly marked feature.

Religious life to-day is weak by reason of the lessened emphasis laid upon compliance with the will of Him we call Master. The justification of the observances of our faith on the ground of their aesthetic appeal, their apt symbolism, their age-long prestige, their pathetic associations, is a form of self-pleasing; in effect, it is religion that finds its centre in the human. Firm ground is discovered when we resolve that whatsoever He saith unto us, we will do it.

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IV. SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVE BASES

an injunction of our Lord is dismissed as unsupported by evidence, what is the basis of the sacrament?

Many thinkers to-day who are hesitant or sceptical about an express command by Christ to baptize yet relate the ordinance to His will in an indirect manner. To borrow a phrase of James Moffatt’s, “Jesus Christ was its Foundation, though not its Founder.”⁶⁵ Did its adoption result from the growth of a conviction in the mind of the Church that it was consistent with His gospel and therefore harmonious with His will? R. Newton Flew thinks “an intelligible sequence of events” would be to suppose that “on the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was given, the Apostles, remembering that Baptism had been linked with the idea of the forgiveness of sins, ask for submission to this rite as a sign of repentance. But since Jesus is now recognized as the exalted Messiah, and has fulfilled the ancient expectation of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Baptism must be ‘in the name of Jesus’, as a token of allegiance to Him.”⁶⁶ This appears to overlook the fact of the immediacy with which Peter gave his reply to the people’s question, “What shall we do?” The answer is given instantaneously; it was clearly not as the result of a conference held there and then in the room where they were assembled. If the course indicated by Peter was the outcome of apostolic deliberations, it must have been the result of decisions taken during the short time intervening between the Resurrection and the Ascension. Are there any signs, however, that the Church in that period contemplated the influx of a crowd of converts and considered the problems relating to the conditions of their reception? All explanations which derive Baptism from an inference of the Church as to her Master’s will must take account of the early appearance of the rite, its universal observance, its theological significance, its unquestioned character—and this in a community which discarded Circumcision, with its immense prestige through Old Testament sanction, in favour of an action of later origin prejudiced by being the already-existing practice of a rival society.

⁶⁴ *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (1946), p. 211.

⁶⁵ *The First Five Centuries of the Church* (1938), p. xv.

⁶⁶ *Jesus and His Church* (1938), p. 165.

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Explanations which base the sacraments on judgments or decisions of the Church really reduce them to the lower level of ecclesiastical ceremonies. Quick wrote,⁶⁷ “The rational justification for Baptism rests, not on the explicit appointment of Jesus (probable though it be that He did appoint it), nor upon the mistaken idea that Baptism bestows anything—even a guarantee—which for the individual is otherwise unobtainable, but rather upon a whole conception of that plan for the salvation of mankind which God revealed through Jesus Christ and carries on in the life of His Church.” He goes on to argue that that plan is sacramental—which he regards as involving the “uniting into fellowship of people of quite different types” thus making it possible for them “to co-operate effectively for the salvation of multitudes”. Quick himself thought that the two chief sacraments were “derived unquestionably from hints, if not from actual directions, conveyed in the words and acts of Jesus” (*op. cit.*, p. 120); and such a view seems a better foundation for them than our estimate of their congruity with the plan of salvation. At another point in his book (*op. cit.*, p. 119) he derives the “ultimate authority” of the particular sacraments “from the fact that all down the course of the Church’s history they have been found to be the appropriate means” of declaring the meaning of the Incarnate Life and effecting its saving work. That appears to supply a merely utilitarian justification for rites for which we claim an authoritarian position. If, finally, we seek the basis of sacraments in the consensus of Christian thought and practice, we fail to find the desired unanimity, for throughout Christian history there have been the widest divergences over the number of the sacraments, the manner of their observance, the agents of their administration, the conditions for their reception, and their interpretation in terms of doctrine.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

To sum up, then, we plead that the arguments against the reliability of Matthew xxviii. 19 can be met with adequate rejoinders, and that the probability of such a command is attested

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by the teaching and practice of the early Church. Critical considerations allow of it, the New Testament situation presupposes it, the theology based on the rite necessitates it— particularly the claim that Christ is the Minister of His own sacraments—and ecclesiastical practice demands it. The difficulties attaching to all the other suggested derivations add to the evidence for Dominical institution. If we cannot accept that, we must take the consequences, which are serious and far-reaching, for these rites can no longer be proved to be of universal obligation. They are no longer real sacraments, but mere denominational rules. If we do accept it, however, we thereby commit ourselves to use and interpret these ordinances in the light of the revealed will of Him Who appointed them, not according to later developments of theology and practice. He remains Lord of that which He created, and, not in the Lord’s Prayer only, but at the Baptistry and the Lord’s Table we must pray, “Thy will be done!”

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⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 177.

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This lecture was delivered in the Livingstone Hall, Westminster, London, on January 3rd, 1947, at a meeting arranged by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research. It was published by the Tyndale Press in 1946. All reasonable efforts have been made to contact the current copyright holder without success. If you hold the copyright to this monograph, please contact me.

Prepared for the Web in February 2005 by Robert I Bradshaw.

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