

The Baptismal Commission in Matthew xxviii. 19.

FROM very early times the Christian Church claimed that the rite of baptism had not only the sanction of our Lord's own submission to it and His disciples' practice of it, but also the authority of a definite divine command (*Matt. xxviii. 19.*) The authenticity of this command has, however, been questioned on various grounds.

Forsyth (*The Church and the Sacraments*, pp. 185f) urges that baptism "was instituted by the ascended Christ through the Apostles as His will for the Church." As to the command in Matthew's Gospel we are told that "a participial clause seems a very small apex on which to balance such a pyramid"; it is, however, surely not proved that a clause is necessarily of inferior importance because it is grammatically subordinate. Forsyth says nothing of our Lord's own baptism, but claims that we should recognise 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 because of the persuasion of Christians that they are divinely commanded. Christianity is a historical religion and cannot be indifferent to what that fact implies. 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 (as the last words quoted from Forsyth show) become optional and vague. That may be a proper and necessary change, but we cannot disguise from ourselves its magnitude. It would in time transform the whole theory and practice of the sacraments. Forsyth carries with him much modern sympathy in so far as his argument claims that the Gospel shall control the sacrament, rather than the converse, but practical difficulties arise when we ask what that Gospel is. Are we to seek it exclusively in the New Testament, as Protestantism asserts, or is it to be found, as Catholicism has

always urged, in the teaching of the Church? The nature of the Church is defined in relation to the sacraments; apart from the two references in *Matthew*, when we first meet the Church we find her observing sacraments.

Hesitation as to the dependence of Christian baptism upon the direct command of Christ has been felt by many on the ground of textual and historical difficulties as to the "Great Commission" recorded by Matthew alone. In view of the uncertainty attaching to it, *Mark xvi.* 16, cannot be used in support of the Matthean passage, and the alternative endings to *Mark* contain no reference to baptism.

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

(1) The Trinitarian theology of verse 19 is held to be too advanced to be possible in the mouth of our Lord at this stage.

(2) *1 Cor. i.* 17 is thought to be inconsistent with such a commission.

(3) The citation of the verse in a shorter form by Eusebius has suggested that his shorter form represents an earlier and better text.

(4) The Early Church practised baptism into "the Name of Jesus" rather than into the Name of the Trinity.

(5) The universality of the Commission ("all nations") is said to indicate a later development.

(1) It has been held that the theology of the passage represents a later stage of doctrinal development. However, P. A. Micklem in the *Westminster Commentary* shows that "the saying has affinities both in style and contents with the great utterance of *Matt. xi.* 25-30. . . . It has a similar Hebraic majestically rhythmic form; 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). 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 is somewhat favourable to the authenticity of the later passage (especially in view of the fact that *Matt. xi.* 25-30 has a parallel in *Luke x.* 21-22), but the Trinitarian reference arouses suspicion by its definiteness. Yet the passage is not entirely isolated in this respect. "The earlier Apostolic teaching presupposes the doctrine, and, indeed, in more than one instance gives it explicit shape." (Micklem *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.) Similar teaching is implied in *John* xiv. 23-26. Especially noteworthy is the Trinitarian implication of the commission and promise recorded in *Luke* xxiv. 49. "Hence the saying takes its place in a context of passages which, even if in a less formal shape, convey the same truth." (Micklem) H. M. Scott (*H.D.B.* V. p. 313f.) 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 *Matt.* xxviii. 19." Even if the Trinitarian reference were deleted, the possibility of a direct command to baptise would not be disproved, though we should no longer have our Lord's *ipsissima verba*.

(2) It is suggested that if Paul had known of such an injunction, he could not have written in 1 *Cor.* i. 17: "Christ sent me not to baptise but to preach the Gospel." (So J. V. Bartlett, *E.R.E.*, II. p. 376a.) If, however, Paul's words are read, as they certainly may be, 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 one that occurs elsewhere in the N.T. (*Mark* ix. 37; *Luke* x. 20; *John* xv. 16; 1 *Cor.* vii. 10). The concluding words of the verse in question deserve attention. Why does Paul add the words, not apparently arising out of anything previously mentioned, "not in wisdom of words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect"? It may be suggested that this is a parallel clause in which the apostle is still pursuing his main line of thought. "Wisdom of speech" (margin) refers to an over-emphasis on expression that might nullify the fact to be expressed, "the Cross of Christ", just as an over-emphasis on baptism might hinder the proclamation of the Gospel it expressed. But just as no one would argue from Paul's words to the entire disuse of speech, but only to its proper subordination as means to an end, so the earlier words, in which baptism is placed in apparent opposition to evangelisation, should be interpreted. They deprecate the exaltation of expression above meaning, of rite above Gospel, of symbol above what is symbolised. The use of the singular ("me") is significant here, in view of Paul's tendency to associate others with himself wherever possible. 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 the commission to them baptism is introduced subordinately as part of the "making of disciples." 1 *Cor.* i. 14-16 refer to cases where the apostle had himself administered baptism. That he preferred to concentrate on the work of preaching, leaving the administra-

tion of baptism to others, is in line with the similar action of Peter (*Acts x. 48*). Streeter and Appasamy, in *The Sadhu*, report that Sadhu Sundar Singh found it expedient to give up baptising his own converts. A missionary of the Baptist Missionary Society (the Rev. F. W. Jarry of Balangir, Orissa) told the writer that for twenty-five years he had ceased to baptise, to avoid the suggestion of superiority to Indian ministers and also to discountenance the idea that Christianity is a European religion. Analogous motives may well have influenced the Apostle Paul, and all these considerations taken together counteract the suggestion that *1 Cor. i. 17* is a disproof of the authenticity of the commission to baptise attributed to our Lord.

(3) Eusebius in a number of places gives this form of the verse:—

πορευθέντες μαθητεύσατε πάντα τα ἔθνη ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι μου

“As in one place he expressly comments on the last three words, they must either have existed in some form of the text known to him or have been strongly impressed on his own mind when he wrote.” (*Sweet, Holy Spirit in the N.T.*, p. 123). Kirsopp Lake (*E.R.E.*, II. p. 380) states that 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 in which the fuller form occurs is questioned. In another case the fuller form of the text has been attributed to a Syriac translator. If the four quotations are by Eusebius himself, they occur in his later writings.

Lawlor and Oulton, in their edition of the *Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine* (S.P.C.K., 1928. II pp. 19-27) give the results of their special study of Eusebius' methods of quotation. They do not deal with biblical quotations. In respect to indirect quotations they conclude that he “trusted overmuch to a remarkably retentive memory, which on occasions played him tricks.” Instances of direct quotation are given (for example, from passages where Josephus and Philo are cited) where the quotation begins or ends in the middle of a sentence, sometimes with resulting unintelligibility. “Now and again he leaves out elsewhere a portion of the text without giving notice to his readers that he has done so. “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.”

It might be contended that such a judgment on Eusebian quotation-methods would scarcely apply to the case under discussion, where the recurrence of the variant is persistent. But in fact Eusebius is not absolutely uniform in his variation from the ordinary reading. Kirsopp Lake (*op. cit.*) says that in his twenty-

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one quotations of the passage, while more often giving it in the form quoted above, he sometimes omits everything between *ἔθνη* and *διδάσκοντες*. 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. Chase (*J.T.S.*, VI. pp. 481ff.) suggests also that "there is not anything unnatural, still less impossible, in the combination 'make disciples of all nations *in my name*, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost'."

The Eusebian method, or lack of method, in biblical quotation can be further illustrated if we examine his usage in the *Demonstratio Evangelica*. *Matt. xxviii. 19* is quoted several times, on each occasion "with the omission of the reference to Baptism and the Trinity." (Ferrar. Translation published by S.P.C.K., p. 20). Examining these quotations in order we observe these facts:—

(1) Bk. I, 3, 6, reads, "Our Lord . . . said . . . Go and make disciples of all the nations, and added (*ἐπιλέγει*) Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." This looks like a split quotation, in view of the inserted words "and added". It would not be unnatural to suppose that Eusebius glided over words not relevant to his subject to reach those upon which he was to comment.

(2) Bk. I, 4, 9, gives the verse as a consecutive quotation. The context refers to the "new covenant", which is "the law" foretold in *Isaiah ii. 3*, as about to "go forth out of Sion." This Eusebius regards as fulfilled in the command to teach in *Matt. xxviii. 19*, which was spoken "in Jerusalem and Mount Sion adjacent thereto." The context thus requires no reference to the baptismal precept.

(3) Bk. I, 6, 24c, again has the verse in a paragraph referring to teaching.

(4) Bk. III, 6, 18d, has the verse thus:—"Go and make disciples of all the nations in My Name, teaching them, etc. . . . and He joined the effect to His word." "What is this effect?" It is the power of the Name that works the expulsion of demons; "even today every demon and unclean spirit shudders at the Name of Jesus as at something that is likely to punish and torment its own nature, and so departs and yields to the power of His Name alone." Here the context seems to have influenced the exact form of the quotation. A reference to the Triune Name would have involved Eusebius in the explanation of matters not germane to his purpose, but he makes what is apparently not so much a quotation as an allusion.

(5) In Bk. III, 7, 136d, the text is thus quoted, "Go and make

disciples of all nations in My Name." The words had been quoted just previously with the omission of "in My Name," and the disciples are imagined as shrinking from so difficult a task, when "the Master solved their difficulties by the addition of one phrase, saying they should triumph 'in My Name', for He did not bid them simply and indefinitely make disciples of all nations, but with the necessary addition of 'in My Name'." So in 138c Eusebius confesses that the Christian preachers could only have succeeded "by the co-operation of Him Who said to them: Make disciples of all nations in My Name." Can it be said that the omission of the words referring to baptism is significant in view of the facts that (i) the context does not require any mention of them, (ii) Eusebius quotes from *Matthew* not consecutively but with interpolated comments, and (iii) in the immediate neighbourhood he combines passages spoken by our Lord on two quite different occasions? He is influenced, not by fidelity to exact phrase or sequence, but by the fitness of the words to his argument.

(6) Bk. IX. II, 445c, refers to the non-reception by the Jews of Christ's grace, adding: "And He bids His own disciples after their rejection, Go ye and make disciples of all nations in My Name. So then, we that are the Gentiles know and receive the prophet that was foretold and sent by His Father." Here again the context necessitates no reference to baptism.

It is possible that the words "in My Name" added to *Matt. xxviii. 19* are the result not of a different text known to Eusebius, but of the influence of *Matt. xix. 20*; "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." *Matt. xxviii. 19* is followed by a promise of our Lord's constant presence with His people, and the similarity of this promise to that in *Matt. xix. 20* may have led to the transfer of the words "in My Name" in the memory of Eusebius.

A study of the above cases of quotation in the one work brings to us no clue as to the omission of the command to baptise, but it proves the statement that in no case does the context require such a reference.

Kirsopp Lake raises the question whether any other support can be found for the Eusebian text. He points out that in *Apol. i. 61*, Justin "quotes a saying of Christ (Except ye be born again ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven) as a proof of the necessity of regeneration, but falls back upon the use of Isaiah and apostolic tradition to justify the practice of baptism and the use of the trine formula. This certainly suggests that Justin did not know the traditional text of *Matthew xxviii. 19* (*E.R.E.*, II, p. 380). In reply it may be urged that the omission to cite a text in a place which to a modern writer seems appropriate is not evidence of the ancient writer's non-acquaintance with it. More-

over, the argument from prophecy is a main theme of the book. "One half of (Justin's) book is occupied with the demonstration that every major characteristic of Christianity had been prophesied and was a fulfilment." (Glover, *Conflict of Religions*, p. 175.) This literary aim would incline the writer to quote an Old Testament utterance in preference to a N.T. text. Further it is possible that Justin's reference to the "reason received from the Apostles" for baptising may cover a general reference to the Gospels which Justin names *Memoirs of the Apostles*. In *Dial* 100, Peter's confession as narrated in *Matt. xvi.* 15-18, is said to be "described in the records of His Apostles." It does not seem to the writer that any support can be found in Justin for the supposed Eusebian text and the absence of variations in all the existing MSS. and versions which contain the passage seems to be decisive proof that the words form part of the original text. 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 thus not be foisted into the text of the Gospels and all evidence of its true character be obliterated." (Chase, *op. cit.*)

It should be noted that even if three of the four cases where Eusebius quotes the usual text are (as by Kirsopp Lake) rejected as doubtful, there is still the Letter of Eusebius to the Church at Caesarea quoted by Socrates (*H.E.*, 1, 8, 38.)

(4) It has been argued that if the Church knew herself to have received her Lord's command to baptise into the Name of the Trinity, it is curious that in the cases of baptism referred to in *Acts* and in the Pauline writings it is not the Trinitarian formula but a shorter one which is employed. Thus *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; *Romans vi.* 3, εἰς χριστόν Ἰησοῦν We are told that "the obvious explanation of the silence of the N.T. on the Triune Name, and the use of another formula in *Acts* and Paul, is that this other formula was the earlier, and that the trine formula is a later addition. It would require very strong arguments to controvert this presumption, and none seems to exist" (Kirsopp Lake, *op. cit.*)

If stress is laid on the use of the Triune Name by 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 has no affinity to anything else we know of Jesus, and this has led to the rejoinder being made that *Matt. xxviii.* 19, implies the idea

of incorporation into the divine Name. "He is not prescribing a formula" but "plainly revealing the spiritual meaning of the outward and visible rite" (Chase, *op. cit.*). Chase thinks we should translate the passage thus: "Immersing them into the Name": "so surely a Greek-speaking Christian would understand the words. He would regard the divine Name as the element, so to speak, into which the baptised is plunged."

Moulton and Milligan (*Vocabulary*, 1930, p. xiv.) take a different view as to the meaning of *eis*. After referring to "the free interchange of *eis* and *en*", they say: "Nor can those who advocate the rendering 'immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' for the baptismal formula in *Matthew xxviii*. 19, do so on the ground that the more familiar rendering in philologically inaccurate. Without entering on the question as to the exact shade of meaning underlying *βαπτίζοντες* it is clear that *eis to 'onoma* may be understood as practically equivalent to *en tw 'onomati* the new light thus joining hands with, and lending support to, the almost unanimous tradition of the Western Church." The Vulgate reading is "*in nomine*."

Chase, however, appeals to Paul's usage, to whose mind he feels that "*eis to 'onoma* in connection with baptism signified not 'in the name of', i.e., by the authority of, but 'into the name of'." This appears to be a case where considerations other than lexical ones may fairly come into play, and the evidence which has been gathered in recent years of the use of "name" where it becomes practically equivalent to "into the possession of," would support a similar interpretation in regard to baptism. For example, Moulton and Milligan (*op. cit.*, s.v. *'onoma*) give instances from the papyri where *eis [to] 'onoma tivos* used of payments made "to the account of anyone," which would seem to justify the translation of the similar phrase in *Matt. xxviii*. 19 by the words: "baptised into the possession of the Father, etc."

Deissmann (*Bible Studies*, p. 146f) quotes an inscription not later than the beginning of the imperial period, which records the purchase of various objects *eis to tou theou [Zeus] 'onoma*. "The person in question, in this connection, is only the nominal purchaser, who represents the real purchaser, i.e., the deity." Just as in the inscription, *to buy into the name of God*, means *to buy so that the article belongs to God*, so also the idea underlying, e.g., the expressions *to baptise 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 emphasise its meaning (consecration to the service or possession of someone) rather than its importance as a formula which necessi-

tated accurate citation. It is in favour of the first interpretation that *Gal. iii.* 27 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 εἰμι Παυλον (Moffatt translates "I belong to Paul") would be that he had been baptised εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Παυλου. On this interpretation the use of the name of our Lord instead of the name of the Trinity would be explained by saying that "baptism in the name of Jesus is really in the name of the Trinity" (*H.D.B.*, p. 241.)

That such a variation between the One Name and the Triune Name was possible is shown by the fact that the *Didache* uses the Matthaean words in cap. VII. and the shorter phrase "baptised into the Name of the Lord" in cap. IX. In cap. VII. the Trinitarian form of the words is twice given, once in relation to immersion, the second time in reference to affusion, but on the second occasion the article is omitted before each divine name. It is perhaps a small point, but for what it is worth it tells somewhat against the phrase having been, at the date of the *Didache*, a rigid formula, to the precise repetition of which importance was attached.

(5) If the disciples had received from their Lord, on this unforgettable occasion, 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? Streeter (*The Four Gospels*, p. 291) regards the words as Matthew's attempt to counteract the prohibition to preach to the Gentiles and Samaritans in *Matt. x.* 5 (see also *op. cit.*, p. 514). The history as recorded in *Acts*, however, does not suggest that the apostles were fettered by any conception of the restriction of the Gospel to men of the Jewish race, but that the problem rather was as to how far circumcision was to be required of Gentile converts. In *Acts x.* 45, it is "they of the circumcision" who are amazed "because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost." The apostles frequently failed at once to realise the meaning and obligations of their Lord's words, and undoubtedly national prejudices long enslaved them. When, however, the Gentile mission begins, 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.

Kirsopp Lake draws an argument against the authenticity of the baptismal command from the fact that *Luke* has no reference to it. He rejects the contention that baptism is implied in the reference to the preaching of repentance and remission of sins in *Luke xxiv.* 47, and says: "Either Luke knew of the commission to baptise (whether in the Triune Name or not) and omitted it, or he did not know it. It seems impossible to find any reason why

he should have omitted it." The reasoning seems to imply the casting of suspicion upon every occurrence in the Gospels which is recorded by only one evangelist, unless we can find a reason for the omission satisfactory to ourselves. That would be an impossibly rigid rule of criticism. There appears to the writer, however, to be substance in the suggestion that for Luke baptism is implied in the mention of the preaching of repentance and forgiveness. The association of baptism with repentance is very frequent in Lukan writings. As Denney (*Death of Christ*, p. 67) says: "In the world of New Testament ideas baptism and the remission of sins are inseparably associated." Such an argument as this will of course not avail to prove anything as to the actual wording of the commission to baptise, but it seems sufficient to meet the hostile argument based on Luke's silence.

The objections to the authenticity of the Baptismal Commission are of differing value and appeal with different force to different minds. It will probably be felt that the really formidable argument arises from the argument that the Trinitarian teachings could not have been given by our Lord at this stage, and from the varying usage of the N.T. as to baptism "into the Name of . . ." If the arguments given against these objections are judged to be insufficient, there would still remain the strong presumption that baptism derived from our Lord, in view of its early prevalence in the Church and the lack of any record of question about its obligation. We should be unable to insist that *Matt. xxviii. 18-20* gave us the *ipsissima verba* of our Lord, but, especially in view of the persistent tradition of a farewell charge similar in tone to this (see *Luke xxiv. 44-49*) we should be justified in presuming that some such command and authorisation were then given. This seems to be the safer course to adopt.

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Mennonite Quarterly Review. Oct. 1952 includes an article on "The Writings of Melancthon against the Anabaptists" and a bibliography on Mennonites in Latin America.

Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society, Oct. 1952 includes a review adding information to the series on Dr. Ward's Trust, *B.Q.*, Jan. 1950-Jan. 1951.

Index to Vol. XIV. This will be distributed with our next issue. We regret the delay.