

## BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

and quasi-magical significance, to a point where they became simply expressions of the will of God. But even as such they were thought to have, by the will of God, some mysterious power, the character of which cannot be determined. Being signs and symbols of the old dispensation, they were also shades of things to come. The new dispensation which has come through our Lord Jesus Christ is considered by the Christian as a continuation, an amplification and a fulfilment of the old one. In this supernatural order of things it is only to be expected that various signs which guided the faithful in the time of the old covenant should have been taken over with a more perfect meaning in the new. But these new meanings are not wholly new ; they are the “fulfilment” of the old and in harmony with them. The people of God has become the Church, gathered from all nations ; and its holy signs are the Sacraments.

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## BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The history of Christian Baptism takes its origins from the mission of John the Baptist. In our day, when that saint has long since ceased to hold the prominent place in Christian popular devotion which he occupied until the close of the Middle Ages, we are perhaps in danger of underestimating his significance in the story of Christianity, and specifically, the part he played in pointing out the meaning of the future sacrament of Baptism. It is sad to recall that the age-old, universal Christian cultus enjoyed by John appears to have terminated, at the time of the Reformation, in what might be called an act of misguided veneration. Zwingli, Calvin and, eventually, Luther, declared that Johannine baptism had the same efficacy as the Christian sacrament, an erroneous view which the Council of Trent defined as heretical.

Yet in any discussion concerning Baptism in the New Testament, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the place of special honour which each of the canonical Gospels reserves for the Baptist. St Mark considers John's work as “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God” (Mk. 1.1). In order to grasp the meaning of John's role in the Christian revelation, it is helpful to keep in mind the various characterisations of him suggested by the evangelists. Broadly speaking, we may say that there are two distinct presentations of him in the New Testament. In the Synoptic Gospels he appears as *Elias redivivus*, as a prophet who announces the imminent coming

of the Christ. An integral part of this conception, as we shall see, is the representation of John as the prophet of Christian Baptism. In the Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, it is as a witness, testifying to the identity of the Christ, that John plays his part in the drama of salvation (cf. the prologue, Jn. I.6-8, 15). A brief study of each of these characterisations of John the Baptist will reveal important aspects of Christian Baptism.

John makes his appearance in the first three Gospels as a prophet. Matthew, Mark and Luke each depict John's principal function as the preaching or "heralding" of the Kingdom. John's is the "voice crying in the desert" (Is. XL.3) proclaiming "the Word of God" which "came to him", as it had come to the Old Testament prophets (Lk. III.2). John appears in the garb which had characterised Elias the prophet (II Kgs. I.8 ; Mt. III.4). Indeed Gabriel had announced to Zachary before John's conception that the child would be "endowed with the spirit and power of Elias" (Lk. I.17). Christ Himself declared to His disciples after John's death that in his person Elias had returned and had "restored all things" (Mt. XVII.11). This "restoration", the work of the returning Elias, which is a recurrent theme in later Old Testament tradition (Mal. III.1-5, 22-3 ; Eccl. XLVIII.I-II), was to become an article of faith in post-biblical Judaism.

John effected this "restoration of all things" by his invitation to *metanoia*, a change of heart or repentance on Israel's part which, by re-establishing good relations with Yahweh, was the necessary preparation for the coming of His Christ. The symbol of this restoration was Johannine baptism, a lustration performed in the river Jordan. John himself called it a baptism "with water, aimed at a change of heart" (Mt. III.11). The second evangelist describes it as "a baptism in token of a change of heart, which looked to the forgiveness of sins" (Mk. I.4). Long after John's death, Paul was to explain to a little group of the Baptist's disciples whom he had discovered at Ephesus how "John practised a baptism of repentance, telling the people they should make an act of faith in him who was to come after him . . ." (Acts XIX.4). The evangelists also tell us that the reception of Johannine baptism was accompanied by a confession of sins (Mt. III.6 ; Mk. I.5). Thus the New Testament reveals John's baptism as a sign of a fundamental change of heart, involving sincere repentance of sin and renewed faith in the proximate advent of the Christ. Moreover, it was by means of this baptism that John effected the "restoration of all things", and was accordingly revealed as a prophet, the second Elias.

John is, in addition, presented by the Synoptics as the prophet of Christian Baptism. "I am baptising you with water in token of repentance", John tells the crowds who gathered to hear him. "He

who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am indeed unworthy to carry his sandals. He will baptise you with a Holy Spirit and fire" (Mt. iii.11). The value of this text lies in its description of the Baptism Christ was to institute as essentially eschatological—that is, as pertaining to the "last times", the Messianic age. The Old Testament prophets had characterised the era ushered in by the Christ as an age when Yahweh would pour out his Spirit in abundance upon mankind (Joel iii.5ff.). They also designated it as the terrible "Day of Yahweh" when He should pass judgment upon all humanity—a judgment whose searching, relentless character they symbolised by fire (Amos vii.4 ; Is. xxx.27-30 ; Mal. iii.2). Faithful to this prophetic tradition, John associated these world-shaking events with the coming of the Christ. His originality consists however in connecting them with what was later to be known as Christian Baptism. Subsequent history was to teach the disciples of Christ to distinguish different moments in this Messianic period, which John, like his predecessors, had depicted, with prophetic foreshortening, as contemporaneous. During the period subsequent to Christ's resurrection, the apostles learned that there was to be a second coming of Jesus Christ, while the interval between, inaugurated by the Pentecostal descent of the Holy Ghost, was designated as the period during which the Church should practise this Baptism "with a Holy Spirit and fire".

Yet the eschatological note picked out by the Baptist's prophecy of Christian Baptism remains important for the New Testament conception of this sacrament. It deserves to be recalled here, particularly as the modern Christian, unlike his brethren of the apostolic age, has a tendency to overlook the relation which the sacramental system bears to Christ's *parousia* or second coming. Paul, writing to the Corinthian church, describes the Eucharistic sacrifice in terms of the second coming. "As often as you eat this bread and drink the chalice, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Cor. xi.26). In Paul's view, the Eucharistic coming of the risen Christ is a reminder of, and a preparation for, his coming at the end of time. On Pentecost Peter had made it clear to his audience that the "baptism with the Spirit" received by the apostolic assembly and accompanied by the charismatic gifts of ecstatic prayer and prophecy, had inaugurated "the Day of Yahweh" and was, in consequence, a sign of the imminence of the eschatological judgment (Acts ii.16-17 ; Joel iii.1ff.). The apostolic experience during the first years of the Church's growth will, as we shall see, clarify this eschatological character of Baptism. For the moment, it is sufficient to realise that in the New Testament the Christian sacraments appear as signs of "the end".

In addition to this prophetic description of Christian Baptism,

another prophetic function of the Baptist's was pointed out in the apostolic preaching : the Messianic anointing of Jesus by his baptism in the Jordan (Acts iv.27 ; x.38 ; cf. Lk. iv.18 ; Heb. i.9). This event occupies a place of first-rate importance in the Synoptic tradition. As described in the first three Gospels, the scene culminates in a theophany (sensible manifestation of the divine presence), in which "the Holy Ghost descended in bodily form like a dove" (Lk. iii.22a, a text which contains the most explicit reference to the Third Person of the Trinity), while Christ heard the voice of his Father declaring the Messianic royalty of His Son (Mt. iii.17 ; Mk. i.11 ; Lk. iii.22b). In this inaugural vision of Jesus' public life, as the Fathers of the Church perceived, all the elements which are to constitute the future sacrament of Baptism stand revealed : the washing with water, the Spirit, the reference to the Triune Godhead. In order to obtain a deeper insight into the meaning of the Messianic anointing of Jesus and of John's part in it, however, we must turn to the Fourth Gospel.

The fourth evangelist assigns the Baptist's message to the category of *testimony*. "I have come baptising with water in order that he might be made known in Israel" (Jn. i.31). This manifestation of the Christ by John is represented as the result of the theophany which occurred at Jesus' baptism. "He who sent me to baptise with water had said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descend and rest, is he who baptises with a Holy Spirit'. And I have seen, and I have continued to testify that he is the Son of God" (Jn. i.33-4). As these words indicate, John's testimony was primarily concerned with the Person of Jesus Christ, and only secondarily with the Baptism which he would institute. The fact that they contain only an implicit reference to Jesus' baptism by John, an incident which is central in the Synoptic tradition, indicates the view which the Fourth Gospel takes of John's function. Earlier in this same chapter the Baptist is represented as contrasting his baptism, not, as in the Synoptics, with that of Christ, but with the presence of Christ himself (Jn. i.26-7).

By focusing attention upon Christ rather than upon Christian Baptism in these opening scenes of his Gospel, St John the evangelist presents a facet of that sacrament which did not appear in the Synoptic accounts : the relation of Baptism to Christ's death. "Behold the Lamb of God ! He who is taking away the world's sin" (Jn. i.29). John attests that Jesus is at once the new Paschal Lamb, anti-type of that lamb which was the perennial symbol of Israel's redemption out of Egypt, as well as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, compared with a lamb in undergoing that redemptive death in which "He bore the sins of many" (Is. lxi.12). By thus adding a new dimension to the Baptist's message, the last of the Gospels provides a deeper insight

into the "Baptism with the Spirit" which Christ is come to impart. Its efficacy depends upon the fact that it is he who will, by his redemptive death, liberate the world from sin.

In the Synoptic narrative of Jesus' public life there is little, at first sight, that seems to throw any light upon the sacrament of Baptism. Twice, it is true, Christ refers to his coming death as a "baptism". When the sons of Zebedee demand the places of honour in his "glory", Jesus asks : "Can you drink the cup I shall drink, or be baptised with the baptism with which I shall be baptised ?" (Mk. x.38). In the context (cf. Mk. x.45) it is clear that he means his death. In *Luke* xii.50 there is a similar reference. "I have a baptism with which I am to be baptised. What anguish do I experience until it be consummated !" This "baptism" is a prelude to the accomplishment of his mission, "to cast fire upon the earth" (Lk. x.49). That "fire" is the judgment, as the verses following indicate (Lk. x.51-3). Luke is moreover probably thinking of the Pentecostal fire, to which he will refer in his second volume (Acts 1.5). These sayings of Jesus both insist upon an essential feature of Christian Baptism, its orientation to Jesus' redemptive death, as well as to the judgment already mentioned by John the Baptist.

While the Synoptic tradition has retained little in its record of Christ's teaching during the public ministry which may be considered as bearing directly upon the later apostolic baptismal theology, it has preserved a conception of the miracles performed during Jesus' mortal life which the Fourth Gospel will develop into a most remarkable sacramental theology. On the Synoptic view, Jesus' miracles of healing are, not less than the exorcisms he performed, an initial assault upon Satan's dominion over men. As a prologue to his narrative of the Galilean ministry, Luke has prefixed the *récit* of Jesus' visit to Nazareth, in which we find recorded the words he read on that occasion from the scroll of Isaias, and which he declared fulfilled in himself. His mission is "to announce release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed at liberty" (Is. LXI.1-2; Lk. IV.16ff.). Matthew's introduction to the public life, which contains a citation of *Isaias* viii.23 ; ix.1, suggests the same campaign against evil in terms of light and darkness (Mt. IV.14ff.). His account of the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniacs presents that miracle as an anticipation of the definitive blow which, by his death, Christ will strike at Satan's kingdom. "Are you come here to torture us before the time appointed by God ?" (Mt. viii.29). The Greek word, here translated as "the time appointed by God", is, in the New Testament, a quasi-technical term for Jesus' passion and death. Perhaps the clearest statement of this miracle-theology by Matthew is found in

his description of Christ's mission of the Twelve. "And calling his twelve disciples, he gave them power over unclean spirits, so as to cast them out and heal all manner of disease and sickness" (Mt. x.1). In Luke's account of the triumphant return of the seventy-two to announce to Jesus the miracles they had performed, even over the demons, Jesus remarks : "I was watching Satan falling from heaven like flashes of lightning" (Lk. x.18). The miracles performed by Christ as well as those performed in his name are, then, a pledge of his ultimate victory over Satan. In other words, the miracles of the public life are an initial step in the founding of the Kingdom upon earth.

In the Fourth Gospel we see this view of Jesus' miracles developed into a theology of the Christian sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Baptism. Just as the Old Testament prophets applied the great events of Israel's past (the exodus out of Egypt, the creation of the world) to contemporary or future happenings in order to explain their religious signification, so too John employs Jesus' miracles to propound the doctrine of the sacramental system. Just as these miracles inaugurated the Kingdom in this world and, as such, look forward to Jesus' salvific death and resurrection (the definitive coming of the Kingdom), so the sacramental practice of the apostolic Church, the chief means for the spread of that Kingdom, looks backwards to the central act of man's redemption. Space permits the mention here of only one example of John's baptismal theology, the cure of the blind man at the pool of Siloe (Jn. ix.1ff.).<sup>1</sup> John relates how Jesus "anoints" the blind eyes with mud as he pronounces the words, "I am the light of the world" (Jn. ix.5), and then sends the blind man to wash in the pool of Siloe. This place-name, which actually means "conduit", is interpreted by the evangelist as "the One sent", that is, the Christ (Jn. ix.7). By such a symbolic interpretation John informs his readers that he has perceived, in this command to wash in a pool which bears Christ's name, an action which prophetically signifies Baptism. The miracle points to those waters which bear Christ's name because in them Christ's sacramental action of regeneration is operative. In such a context Jesus' reference to himself as "the light of the world" becomes clear, Baptism being regarded by the apostolic Church as an illumination (Eph. v.14; Heb. vi.4; x.32). Christ's concluding remarks in this episode again draw attention to its baptismal signification. "I am come into this world [to effect] a discrimination : that the sightless may obtain the gift of sight and that those who see

<sup>1</sup> The interpretation followed here is that of Père M.-J. Lagrange, O.P., in his commentary on St John's Gospel. More recently, Oscar Cullmann has developed this sacramental theme of the Fourth Gospel in a fascinating monograph, *Les sacrements dans l'évangile johannique*, Paris 1951.

may become blind" (Jn. ix.39). The Church has always taught that faith is required in him who would receive the baptismal illumination.

The Fourth Gospel also records two discourses of Jesus which contain his baptismal teaching. In the first of these, the conversation with Nicodemus, Baptism is described by a characteristically Johannine *double entendre* as a birth "anew" or "from above". The rest of the dialogue makes it very clear that what is meant is a new, supernatural birth. It is the work of "the Spirit" (Jn. iii.8); its author is "the Son of man who descended from heaven" (Jn. iii.13); it effects "eternal life", to be conferred by Christ once he is "exalted" upon the cross and, ultimately, at the right hand of the Father. This last point is illustrated by the brazen serpent which Moses "exalted" in the desert (Jn. iii.14) and which, in late Old Testament theological thought, had been regarded as a "symbol of salvation" (Wisd. xvi.6). The most important item in this instruction of Christ's is however the description of the new birth as effected "by water and the Spirit" (Jn. iii.5). This is the clearest statement in the New Testament of the role played by these two essential elements in Christian Baptism. Another conversation, that between Jesus and the Samaritan woman near the well, contains important Baptismal doctrine. The distinction Jesus makes on this occasion between well-water and "living water" (water flowing in a brook or from a spring) would appear to be the source of the Church's insistence from earliest times upon the use of flowing water in the administration of Baptism (cf. *Didache* vii, 1). In John's narrative, "living water" is a symbol for a mysterious, supernatural reality. "Any man who drinks this water" (that drawn from Jacob's well) "will be thirsty again. Whoever drinks the water I shall give him, will never again experience thirst. For the water I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water that leaps up unto eternal life" (Jn. iv.13-14). Among the Fathers of the Church, Justin and Irenaeus understand these words of Baptism. Moreover, the evangelist himself explains this "fountain" or "rivulets" of "living water" as "the Spirit whom those who came to believe in him were destined to receive" (Jn. viii.38-9). This "living water" which symbolises the Spirit is the sacrament of Baptism. Christ's promise that this divinely given "drink" will slake thirst for ever is a reference to a quality of Baptism which distinguishes it from the Eucharist, the impossibility of its being repeated.

The scene which closes Jesus' mortal life in the Fourth Gospel, the piercing of his sacred side, is of the greatest significance for John, as his insistence of his own veracity as an eye-witness shows (Jn. xix.35). Moreover John makes use of this same episode in his description of "Jesus Christ the Son of God" in his first epistle (1 Jn. v.6-8). "He

who is come by water and by blood, Jesus Christ ; not with water only but with water and with blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. There are accordingly three who bear witness, the Spirit, the water, the blood ; and these three are in agreement". John clearly regards the water and the blood which issued from Christ's side as miraculous, and therefore as most meaningful, like the other "signs" recounted in his Gospel. John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria, with other Fathers of the Church, regard the water as a symbol of Baptism, while the blood signifies the Eucharist. St Augustine asserts that the birth of the Church, the new Eve, occurred on the cross because of this emission of blood and water "in which we perceive the sacraments by which the Church is built up".

St Matthew's Gospel reaches its conclusion and its climax in the mandate of the risen Christ to his apostles. "Universal power in heaven and upon earth has been granted to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all peoples, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (Mt. xxviii.18-19). In virtue of his investiture with supreme and universal domination, conferred by God the Father in consequence of his death and resurrection, Christ now declares himself author of the Church and of the sacrament of Baptism. The precision and the liturgical character of the formula, "in the Name . . .", have led modern Catholic scholars to perceive in these words a reflection of the liturgical practice already in general use throughout the apostolic Church by the time our canonical Greek version of this Gospel came to be written. Whether or not this formulation of Trinitarian faith had supplanted an earlier custom of baptising "in the Name of Jesus" is a question we shall discuss later.

It is remarkable that nowhere in the New Testament are the apostles said to have received Christian Baptism, according to the rite which, from the day of Pentecost itself, they administered to the first converts to Christianity. The silence of the sacred text upon this point would not, of course, constitute an argument by itself, were it not for other evidence provided by *Acts*. St Luke makes it clear that the apostolic group in the upper room was baptised with the Holy Ghost in the fires of Pentecost. He first carefully records Christ's promise of this "baptism". "Whereas John baptised with water, you will be baptised with a Holy Spirit not many days hence" (*Acts* i.5 ; cf. also Lk. xxiv.49). Then in his description of Pentecost itself he shows how this prediction was fulfilled by the appearance of "tongues like fire, which, being divided, rested upon each of them. And they were all filled with a Holy Spirit" (*Acts* ii.3-4). What is

of greatest significance, however, in Luke's account, is the presentation of the unique character of this "baptism". By it the "new Israel" was created out of the little band of disciples in the upper room. That the apostolic group at once perceived the significance of what had happened to them is evident from Peter's Pentecostal discourse in which he cites a section from Joel describing the wonders of "the last days" where mention is made of the surviving remnant of Israel (Joel iii.5). This was that holy nucleus which Isaias had foretold would, in the Messianic age, include "everyone enrolled amongst those destined for life in Jerusalem" (Is. iv.2-3; cf. Acts ii.47).

This consciousness of the singular nature of their Pentecostal experience led the newly created community to practise a completely new rite in admitting to their ranks those who wished to join them: baptism with water, and the imposition of hands by which the Holy Spirit was visibly imparted. The "baptism with the Spirit" which they themselves had received in fulfilment of Christ's promise and which had constituted them the Messianic community was, of its very nature, impossible of repetition. Yet they were aware, as *Acts* shows, that by Christian Baptism they could bring new members into the Church and so impart to them a share in that same Spirit who had descended upon themselves in a special manner. Perhaps the episode of Cornelius's conversion is the one which best illustrates the apostolic awareness of the distinction which obtained between their Pentecostal "baptism" and sacramental Baptism. Before this pagan and his household were baptised they received the Holy Ghost (*Acts* x.44-6). Peter's description of the extraordinary event, in his speech to the Jerusalem congregation, is to be noted. "The Holy Spirit fell upon them exactly as upon us in the beginning" (*Acts* xi.15). Yet Peter's subsequent decision, caused by this very manifestation of the Spirit, puts a somewhat different construction upon his statement. "He ordered them to be baptised in the Name of Jesus Christ" (*Acts* x.48). Despite his insistence upon the similarity of Cornelius's experience to that of the community on Pentecost, Peter recognised an essential difference. He knew that the first descent of the Spirit had been a baptism which transformed the disciples into the "new Israel". In the case of Cornelius and his household, Peter saw that the coming of the Holy Ghost was proof of God's will that they should be aggregated to the apostolic community by Christian Baptism.

One further point concerning the primitive community's conception of Christian Baptism deserves to be mentioned here. It would appear, on the evidence of the very ancient sources which Luke employed in writing the first part of *Acts*, that in the first years the gift of the Holy Spirit was looked upon as an effect of the imposition of hands,

the rite which normally accompanied Baptism, rather than as the direct result of Baptism itself. The well-known story of Philip's evangelisation of Samaria seems to exemplify such a viewpoint (Acts viii.5-17). Thus it would appear that while admission into the Messianic community was regarded as the primary effect of Baptism, the explicit reference to the Spirit was reserved for the imposition of hands. At the same time, it must be remembered that "remission of sins" was also regarded as an effect of Baptism (Acts ii.38), and it is quite clear that from the beginning the Church distinguished this sacrament from the purely symbolical nature of Johannine baptism. Further reflection upon Christian Baptism moved the Church to make explicit what perhaps had only been implied in her earlier view, viz. that by Baptism the Holy Spirit was communicated to the Christian. It may well be that such a theological development was largely due to the reflection of St John the evangelist, who recognised in the waters of Baptism a symbol of the presence of the Spirit. At any rate, by the time the Fourth Gospel was written, apostolic Christianity had consciously adverted to the operation of the Holy Ghost in Baptism itself and had formulated a definition of the sacrament as a rebirth of "water and the Spirit" (Jn. iii.5).

We may now ask a question which we mentioned earlier and which has long been a subject of discussion amongst students of the New Testament : what is meant by "Baptism in the Name of Jesus"? On Pentecost Peter remarks to those who found faith in his preaching : "Repent, and let each of you have himself baptised in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts ii.37-8). The Samaritans converted by Philip were "baptised in the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts viii.10), as were also the Ephesian followers of John the Baptist whom Paul converted to Christianity (Acts xix.4-6). It is perhaps Paul's account of his own baptism by Ananias in Damascus which gives the best insight into the meaning of this expression (Acts xxii.16). Ananias is represented as saying to the blinded Saul : "Arise, be baptised, and be washed from your sins by invoking his Name". From this it is evident that the invocation of "his Name" is made, not by the minister of the sacrament, but by the candidate for Baptism himself. The supreme importance which the apostolic Church attached to this baptismal profession of faith resulted in the designation of Baptism as "Baptism in the Name of Jesus". Paul has preserved one version of this *credo* for us in his letter to the Romans. "If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and you believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. x.9). A few verses further on, the apostle provides what appears to have been the

Scriptural basis for this element in the baptismal liturgy (Rom. x.13). It is the same text of Joel mentioned in Peter's Pentecostal sermon : "Whoever invokes the Name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel iii.5).

What is the meaning of such a formula, "Jesus is Lord" ? The answer to this question is provided by *Philippians* ii.9, where Jesus' exaltation is described as the conferring upon him by God the Father, of the divine Name "Lord". This characteristically Semitic way of stating that Jesus' divinity was revealed to the first disciples by his resurrection and elevation to the right hand of God indicates that the baptismal invocation of "Jesus' Name" (i.e. "Lord") was a profession of faith in the fact that he is divine. It is to be observed that such a credal formula implied, moreover, the Trinitarian faith of the primitive Church. For it was to the revelation of Jesus' glorification that the apostolic community owed its belief in the Trinity. Through her contemplation of the risen Lord, the Church was led to acknowledge the Father as source of Jesus' glory and to confess the Holy Spirit, principle of all holiness, as the gift of her ascended Master. Thus the invocation of "the Name of the Lord Jesus" was a memorial of the newly found Christian faith in the Triune Godhead.

It was this baptismal confession which gave meaning to the reception of Baptism as the means of entering into union with the risen Christ, and consequently (although this implication seems to have dawned only gradually upon the early community) with the Spirit and with the Father. We catch glimpses of this comprehension of the nature of Baptism in the Pauline epistles. To the Corinthian church whose unity was being compromised by the appearance of a partisan spirit ("I am Paul's. I am Apollo's. I am Cephas's", 1 Cor. i.12), St Paul remarks : "Surely Paul was not crucified for you ? Surely you were not baptised in the name of Paul ? I am grateful that I have baptised none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest any man say you have been baptised in my name" (1 Cor. i.13-15). In Paul's view, the unity of the Church derives from the personal union with Christ entered into by each Christian at his baptism. In urging the Ephesians to preserve the "unity of the Spirit", Paul explicitly refers this union to each of the Persons of the Trinity. [There is but] "one Body and one Spirit, just as you have been called by one hope in your vocation. [There is but] one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all . . ." (Eph. iv.3-5). Baptism, then, makes the Christian one with the glorified Lord, Jesus Christ, since he is united to him by the operation of the Holy Ghost, and through this union with Son and Spirit, one with the Father. This doctrine implies a deep theological development which the baptismal teaching of the Jerusalem church underwent at the hands of St Paul, a development we shall presently investigate.

## BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A word must be said concerning the eschatological aspect of the apostolic community's understanding of Baptism, that character of the sacrament to which the Baptist had referred in prophetic terminology by calling it a "Baptism with the Spirit and fire". According to the Old Testament scheme, history was to find its consummation both theologically and historically in the coming of the Messias. He would usher in the final judgment of God upon humanity, since in his person the good must win a definitive triumph over evil. The New Testament revelation which crowned the Messianic expectations of Judaism modified this theology of history profoundly. Jesus' ascension into heaven after his death and resurrection taught the apostles that there was to be a second coming, in glory, of the risen Lord. As to the period intermediary between Jesus Christ's first and second coming, it was the descent of the Holy Spirit that revealed its significance. This intercalary era was indeed part of the "Messianic times". It was, however, specifically a time of preparation for the final *parousia*. The preparation consisted chiefly in the building up of God's Kingdom upon earth, the Church, by means of the Christian sacraments. Baptism had its place in such a scheme of things as a rite of initiation into the Kingdom which washed away men's sins and imparted the divine gift promised during the "last times", the Holy Spirit. As John the Baptist had predicted, it was a "Baptism with the Spirit". It was also a "Baptism with fire", symbol of Yahweh's final judgment at the end of time, because by destroying sin it anticipated that judgment and assured men of salvation. This effect is described by *Acts* with the remark, "the Lord added to the community those who were numbered amongst the saved" (*Acts* ii.47).

We have already seen that the orientation of Baptism to Christ's redemptive death is traceable to the public teaching of Jesus himself. The reference of Baptism to his resurrection, as we also saw, was recognised by the apostolic Church who called it "Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus" and who cherished the tradition of her risen Master's mandate to "make disciples of all nations by baptising them". It was left to St Paul, however, as one of Christianity's first and greatest theologians, to work out the doctrinal implications contained in the deposit of the Church's faith and to create what we may call the first baptismal theology. Two passages in his epistles epitomise his view of Baptism. "All of you who have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ" (*Gal.* iii.27). In the primitive preaching, Baptism was indicated as the ritual initiation into the "new Israel", the community of the risen Christ. In writing to the Galatians, Paul expresses his profound intuition of this sacrament as a being baptised "*into Christ*". In his eyes it is an act of incorporation into the Body of the risen Lord,

by which the Christian becomes identified with him as one of his members. Or, as he states to the Corinthians, the baptised becomes "one Spirit" with the risen Lord (1 Cor. vi.17). "For indeed by one Spirit we have—all of us—been baptised into one Body" (1 Cor. xii.13). Such is the dynamic realism of the Pauline conception of "the Body of Christ", Paul's theological transposition of the notion of "the Kingdom of God" in its terrestrial phase. Accordingly, in the text we have cited from *Galatians*, the phrase "to put on Christ" signifies to become a member of the Body of Christ, to become one with Christ. And this identification, as Paul states, is accomplished by Baptism.

Just how this union of the Christian with the glorified Lord is effected through Baptism, is explained by the second text we wish to recall, the only other place in the Pauline letters containing the expression "to be baptised into Christ". "You are surely aware that we, who were baptised into Christ Jesus, were baptised into his death. We were then buried together with him by this Baptism into his death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so also we may live by a new kind of life. For if we have grown together with [him] into the likeness of his death, so also shall we grow with [him] into the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. vi.3-5). Baptism unites the Christian with Christ by uniting him with the two acts through which Christ accomplished our redemption, his death and resurrection. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul had sketched this same baptismal theology in terms of Israel's redemption from Egypt. Because they shared the experiences which, under the leadership of Moses, had liberated them from Egyptian bondage (the guidance and protection of the cloud, the crossing of the Red Sea), God's people had been in effect "baptised into Moses" (1 Cor. x.1-2). Similarly in the text we are considering, Paul teaches that the double act of the Father's by which Christ "was handed over for our sins and raised for our justification" (Rom. iv.25) reaches out, in Baptism, to include the neophyte, and thus through this baptismal experience of the act of man's redemption the catechumen is "baptised into Christ", united with his glorified Saviour.

With this magnificent conception we reach the climax of New Testament baptismal theology. The eschatological note first sounded by the message of the Baptist in an endeavour to foretell the nature of Christian Baptism, was developed by the apostolic teaching, which regarded it as the act of initiation into the Messianic community of the elect. Finally, it appears fully orchestrated by St Paul's genius as an integral part of his theme of "the Body of Christ". The other New Testament writings concerning Baptism merely provide varia-

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tions on this Pauline theme, describing it as a “rebirth”, an “illumination”, a “sealing” with the Spirit, a “washing white in the Blood of the Lamb”.

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### THE BELOVED DISCIPLE AND THE RESURRECTION<sup>1</sup>

At first sight it might appear that the fifty-six verses which St John devotes to the Resurrection are not very much. The experience had been so new and overwhelming. Indeed “newness” is the quality of that “Day” which began at the Resurrection and will last through all eternity.

As we read, we find that the Resurrection has caught up the former facts and loves and transformed them. Jesus, triumphant, recalls his Passion by showing his hands and feet and side. The tender gladness of the Apostles at seeing their Lord again is followed by the promised giving of the Spirit and the passing on of Christ’s redemptive mission with the power to forgive sins (xx.20-3). The crucified man is recognised for what he is : “My Lord and my God”. Jesus is the same tender Master who cooks breakfast for his hungry disciples and manifests himself to fishermen by a miraculous catch of fish, as he had done before (xxi.6-9 ; Lk. v.1-10). As then it was Peter who was told that he would catch men, and Peter’s boat from which they were fishing, so now it is Peter who draws the net to land. And his triple denial is transformed by a triple declaration of humble love. In answer to that declaration, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, commits to Peter the feeding of his own flock for which he laid down his life, a flock which will include others who are not of the Jews (x.11-16 ; xxii. 15-17). Here, then, is John’s own account of Christ’s foundation of his Church, and it completes what we already know.

John is a master of characterisation. Let us study the effect of the Resurrection by taking three of his characters and seeing how they are transformed. We have just spoken of Peter. There is the same affectionate impetuosity which sends him running to the tomb (apparently rather out of breath, for the younger man outruns him) and makes him blurt out the question concerning the Beloved Disciple : “Lord, what about him ?” There is a certain incompre-

<sup>1</sup> [This article has unfortunately been considerably reduced owing to lack of space.  
—ED.]