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### The Significance of the Baptism of Jesus

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**THE BAPTISM OF JESUS; Zahrte; S.T.M., 1961**

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

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May 1961

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The idea for this study was not original with the author, but came from a suggestion made by Dr. Paul M. Bretscher, whose help and guidance as faculty adviser are also herewith acknowledged. At first glance, it might not appear that the subject is broad enough to warrant the time and the effort necessary for the preparation of a thesis. There are limitations, of course, not only because Scriptural references to the baptism of Jesus are quite brief, but also because theological studies on baptism have generally been more concerned about the nature and meaning of baptism as a sacrament than they have been about the baptism of Jesus and its significance. But therein lies the challenge. Why was Jesus baptized, and what significance does this event have in relation to His person, His work, and the teachings of the Church concerning Him?

There are numerous answers proposed in response to those questions. One objective of this thesis will be to review some of the more prominent suggestions. In doing this, we wish to bear in mind the contributions that have been made on the subject by theologians during the twentieth century. In particular, we wish to consider the thinking of Oscar Cullmann<sup>1</sup> and W. F. Flemington,<sup>2</sup> whose works have been studied more intensively than most other sources listed in the Bibliography.

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<sup>1</sup>Oscar Cullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1956).

<sup>2</sup>W. F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London: S. P. C. K., 1953).

and also the observations advanced by the Special Commission on Baptism which worked under the auspices of the Church of Scotland.<sup>3</sup> As we weigh the various views of such men, compare them with the thoughts of others, and evaluate all in the light of what God Himself says on the matter, we do so with the prayerful hope that our own conclusions will be more than just a general summarization of what has already been said. On the other hand, while attempting to make a definite contribution toward a better understanding of the problem, we shall seek to exercise due caution, so that our findings will not be something forced upon, but rather drawn out of, the teachings of the Holy Scripture.

Many of the propositions posed as possible answers to the questions concerning the significance of the baptism of Jesus show some degree of similarity to one another, and in some instances, there is much overlapping of thought. But even though all suggestions may not have the same merit, and some may definitely prove to be unacceptable, the very variety of thought on the subject seems to indicate that there can be no simple, pat answer. Rather, it would seem both reasonable and advisable to include several factors when discussing the significance of the baptism of our Lord. We find such a suggestion, for example, in the Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, which says: "Jesus sought baptism partly to express his sympathy with John's work, partly to dedicate himself to his own work, and partly to express his assumption of the sins of men."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Church of Scotland, Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism (Edinburgh, Blackwell, 1955).

<sup>4</sup>John D. Davis, "Baptism," The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible (Revised edition; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1944), p. 59.

The Interpreter's Bible, following a similar line of thought, offers three answers to the question, "Why was Jesus baptized?": one, that after hearing of the work of John and the moral awakening which it was producing, Jesus may have wanted to bring his own comradeship to the side of John; second, (and quite fantastic in our minds) that there was a possibility of subtle sin, "A shrinking from what might lie ahead"; and third, that never thinking of himself in isolation, Jesus

identified himself in utter sympathy with his nation's need. He was a son of Israel, and all that belonged to his people in heritage as well as in hope he took upon himself. Vicariously, therefore, he would be baptized into their need for repentance, and with them and for them express the urgency of commitment to the kingdom of God.<sup>5</sup>

There are other reasons which might be mentioned, too, including the interpretation of the words of Jesus "Thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

Those words of the Savior, as well as the details of the baptism itself, will receive special attention in the exegetical study that follows. We shall translate and analyze the accounts of the baptism, as found in the Synoptics, and also the references to it recorded by St. John. In doing this, we feel it will be helpful to give some thought to John the Baptist, his mission and message, and in particular, the rite of baptism which he performed. Here, however, there are many related questions which lie beyond the scope of this thesis. Such questions are: Had John met or known Jesus prior to this or not? What mode of baptism did John employ in his work? and, did Jesus use the same mode,

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<sup>5</sup>Walter Russell Bowie, "The Gospel According to St. Luke," The Interpreter's Bible, (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1952), VIII, 78.



or have the same method in mind, when He had His disciples baptize others, and when He instituted the Sacrament of Baptism? Other questions which for lack of complete information cannot be answered conclusively, will nevertheless receive some attention. Here we have in mind the matter of references, or lack of them, concerning the baptism of Jesus in the writings of St. Paul and other parts of the New Testament outside the Gospels.

The research for this thesis has, for the most part, been limited to writings published during the twentieth century, representing the thinking of various German theologians, as well as English and American. The major library sources for the research were: Fritzlaff Memorial Library of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; the library of Central Theological Seminary, and the library of Midland College, both located in Fremont, Nebraska. Quotations from the Bible are taken from the Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated.

## CHAPTER II

### A TEXTUAL STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURAL ACCOUNT

#### The Matthean Account (Mt. 3:13-17)

Our study of the baptism of Jesus as recorded in the Bible will be based on the Gospels in the order in which they appear in the Scriptures. In beginning with the account as found in St. Matthew, we shall therefore consider first that description of the event which is the longest among the three Synoptics. Our study will give attention to the ministry of John the Baptist in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> For the present, we are concerned only with the baptism of Jesus itself, as described in Matthew 3:13-17:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him, and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

The evangelist begins the account with the word *τότε*. The frequency of its usage by St. Matthew might tempt the reader to overlook its significance. A correlative adverb of time, it is used to introduce that which follows in time. Here it sets the stage for what is to follow, and presupposes, as Bruce points out, that John had foretold and described the Messiah.<sup>2</sup> It may also indicate, as Lenski suggests, that

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<sup>1</sup>Infra, Chapter Three, pp. 28ff.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," The Expositor's Greek Testament, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), I, 85.

at this time the Baptist was "at the full height of his activity."<sup>3</sup> The verb *παραγίνεται* is identical with that used in verse 1 concerning John, and implies more than an act of motion. It means to come in the sense of "appear, make a public appearance"<sup>4</sup> and Lenski comments that "as the Baptist stepped out of retirement into his great public mission, so Jesus now does the same."<sup>5</sup> However, the motion involved in this appearance seems to receive emphasis by the use of the three prepositions, and the form of the historical present, which results somewhat in a dramatic effect. Thus Jesus comes from *ἐν* Galilee, to *ἐν* the Jordan, towards *πρός* the Baptist. The genitive of the infinitive *τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι* expresses purpose, in order to be baptized by him. It may imply, as Lenski says, that Jesus requested John to baptize him.<sup>6</sup>

A minor question of textual variants occurs at the beginning of verse 14, where Nestle omits *Ἰωάννης*, and the subject is understood from the third person verb form. On the other hand, the KSV, The Expositor's Greek Testament, and Lenski are among those who include the name John. The meaning, of course, remains the same in either case. The verb *δικα-κωλύω* used only here in the New Testament, implies an earnest effort to prevent or forbid (note the *δικά*), and the imperfect is used to suggest a persistent but unsuccessful attempt.<sup>7</sup> A key word for this entire

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<sup>3</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 142.

<sup>4</sup>W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 619.

<sup>5</sup>Lenski, loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>A. B. Bruce, op. cit., p. 85.

study is the verb βαπτίζω, which when transliterated into the English language as "baptize", does not help us to understand its meaning. The Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon says: "Dip, immerse, mid. dip oneself, wash (in non-Christian lit. also 'plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm', etc.)."<sup>8</sup> Thus this word describes action which brings one into contact with water or some other liquid. Describing the action, however, does not fully explain the significance of such activity. We shall treat the question of this significance in another chapter. For the present, we wish to determine the precise meaning of the word βαπτίζω itself.

Virtually all lexicons and authorities agree that the basic meaning of the word βαπτίζω is "to dip" or "to plunge". Flemington, who has assembled a concise summary of authoritative comment on the word, says, "The verb βαπτίζω is an intensive or iterative form of the verb βάπτω, both meaning "to dip" or "to plunge".<sup>9</sup> Both Flemington and Gullman seem to take it for granted that when the word is used to describe the baptism of John, it necessarily implies immersion. Thus, in comparing John's baptism with the Jewish baptism of proselytes, Flemington flatly asserts that "both use baptism by immersion."<sup>10</sup> Likewise Gullmann, without actually having established any basis for the claim, assumes that immersion was the mode of baptism employed by John, when he says: "The Christian sacrament of the Holy Spirit, prepared and proclaimed in

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>9</sup>W. F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London: S. P. C. K., 1953), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

Johannine baptism, remained a Baptism, an Immersion.<sup>11</sup> Although many others share this view, there are also reliable authorities who do not believe that John's baptism was by immersion.

A very convincing case is presented by John Murray,<sup>12</sup> who goes into considerable detail, with great skill and clear reasoning, to demonstrate that βαπτίζω need not mean immerse, but that this word and its various cognates can be used to denote an action which neither indicates nor implies immersion. Passages from the Old Testament where the word βάπτω occurs, without necessarily meaning immerse, are: Lev. 14:6, 51; Ruth 2:14; and I Sam. 14:27. Other passages where the word is used, but does not necessarily mean immerse, are: Ex. 12:22; Lev. 4:6, 17; 9:9; Num. 19:18; Deut. 35:24; and II Kings 8:15. New Testament passages, where βαπτίζω is used more frequently, but where it can hardly mean immerse, include Luke 11:36; and I Cor. 10:2. In Hebrews 9:10 the word βαπτισμός occurs, which can have several meanings, including sprinkling. Thus Murray defines βαπτίζω as a word which indicates a certain effect without itself expressing or prescribing the particular mode by which this effect is secured.<sup>13</sup>

As for the phrase ἐν ὕδατι, found in Matthew 3:11, the preposition ἐν does not warrant the supposition that βαπτίζω means to immerse. Baepfler correctly states: "Nor does the fact that John baptised

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<sup>11</sup>Oscar Cullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 11.

<sup>12</sup>John Murray, "Christian Baptism", The Westminster Theological Journal, XIII (May, 1951), 105-150 and XIV (Nov., 1951), 1-45.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 113-32.

and ἐν ὕδατι demand a baptism by immersion, for we have here the instrumental use of the dative and of ἐν, indicating what John used when he baptised."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Manz refers to the observation of Hamilton that "the word βαπτίζω is never in the Scriptures found in connection with the phrase εἰς ὕδωρ; into water."<sup>15</sup> He also describes ten different instances of early Christian art, illustrating baptismal scenes, at least one of which dates back to the second century A.D. Five of these art pieces depict the baptism of Jesus by John, and all of them portray a scene in which the Lord is standing in the water (not immersed), with John pouring water over Him.<sup>16</sup> As a final note on this matter, we refer again to Murray, who suggests that the baptism of fire foretold by John received its symbolic fulfilment in the cloven tongues of fire that sat upon the disciples at Pentecost. If Murray is correct, such a baptism cannot be described as immersion. Then, too, Peter speaks of this phenomenon and relates it to the prophecies of Joel 2:28 (other parallel Old Testament prophecies are: Is. 32:15; Prov. 1:23; and Ezek. 56:25) where the Hebrew words יָרַד, יָפַד and פָּרַס mean respectively "to pour out, shed forth, and sprinkle."<sup>17</sup>

Returning once more to the study of the text before us, we continue with verse 16. The verb ἀποκρίνομαι, when used in a formula with εἰπαίην, is often left untranslated. The reply of Jesus ἄφες ἔργα is

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<sup>14</sup>Walter A. Baepfer, "The Mode of Baptism," Concordia Theological Monthly, X (August, 1939), 566.

<sup>15</sup>G. Manz, "ΒΑΠΤΙΖΩ, A Lexicographical Study," Concordia Theological Monthly, XI (September, 1940), 679.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 665-67.

<sup>17</sup>Murray, op. cit., p. 127.

idiomatic, *ἀφες* being the second aorist imperative of *ἀφίημι*. On the meaning of *ἀφες*, which can hardly be fully reproduced in the English word "now", Lenski observes:

The word "now" refers to this moment when Jesus is about to assume his office. Sufficient reason for the Baptism of Jesus exists only "now" and could not exist at any other time in his life or in connection with his work.<sup>18</sup>

We ought to note that the phrase "let it be so now" is not a command, but rather a request to concede to the unique nature of the situation.

The phrase *πρέπον ἐστίν*, the present neuter participle with the copula, followed by the dative of the person and the infinitive, is a periphrastic perfect tense. The pronoun *ἡμῖν* refers to Jesus and John, but seems to convey more than the impersonal idea which might be rendered: "It's all right for us to do this." Rather it was fitting for these two to do this. Thus Voorhis writes:

It seems most natural to take the "us" as referring to Jesus and John . . . . It was the protest of John which was preventing the fulfillment of righteousness in that John, by performing the rite of baptism, would enable Jesus to do that which He counted an act of righteousness.<sup>19</sup>

It was not something that Jesus needed, as did the others whom John had baptized, but because of His request, as He now was about to enter His public ministry, it was an act which was significant for both of them. As Lenski says: "Jesus is thinking of their respective offices. It was proper that they should carry out whatever their respective offices required."<sup>20</sup> Meyer adds the note that this phrase presupposes on the part

<sup>18</sup>Lenski, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>19</sup>John W. Voorhis, "The Baptism of Jesus and His Sinlessness," The Evangelical Quarterly, VII (1935), 42-3.

<sup>20</sup>Lenski, op. cit., p. 126.

of Jesus a clear vision regarding His vocation, and John's relation to it.<sup>21</sup> The object of the infinitive *πληρωσε* is *πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην*. A careful study of this phrase merits special consideration.<sup>22</sup> The closing phrase *τότε ἐφίησεν αὐτόν*, does not suggest the mode in which John administered the baptism of Jesus.

With verse 16 we have the feeling of entering into a holy place, and sharing with the angels a glimpse of God Himself. The action of the baptism is presented as having been concluded (the aorist participle *βαπτισθείς*) and attention is immediately focused on what followed. The adverb *εὐθὺς*, which could modify *βαπτισθείς*, is best taken with *ἀνέβη*. It tells us that Jesus went up from the water without delay so that the descent of the Spirit and the heavenly witness occurred while Jesus was out of the water, most likely standing on the bank of the river. Though the interpretation is possible that these events happened simultaneously, Lenski points out that "the aorist participle preceding an aorist finite verb (*ἀνέβη*) ordinarily denotes action prior to the verb," and so he says:

After the baptism was finished (*βαπτισθείς*), whatever may have been the mode of administration, Jesus without delay (*εὐθὺς*) walked away from the water of the river, so that his anointing with the Spirit of God did not take place, as many artists picture it, while he was being baptized, or while he stood knee-deep in the water, but on the bank of the river, a little distance from the water.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew, translated by Peter Christie, the translation revised and edited by Frederick Crombie and William Stewart (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Infra, p. 55ff.

<sup>23</sup> Lenski, op. cit., p. 129.



The phrase ἀνέβη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος does not imply that Jesus had been immersed under the water, and although Mark uses ἐκ rather than ἀπὸ, neither clause refers to the baptismal act, but to what followed, as Lenski says: "Jesus stopped out of (ἐκ) the water onto the bank and walked from (ἀπὸ) the water onto the bank."<sup>24</sup>

The next clause of verse 16 presents us with an amazing theophany, and begins appropriately with the demonstrative particle ἰδοὺ, "behold." What happened was something calling for special notice. It was more than a vision, as some have suggested, since the Baptist asserts (John 1:32-33) that he was a witness of the event. "The heavens" (οἱ οὐρανοί) the plural being used almost interchangeably with the singular, but generally employed as the preferred term for the abode of God.<sup>25</sup> The verb ἠνεῴχθησαν, is the first aorist passive of ἀνοίγω, which means "to open." The passive means "to be opened", and implies that such action takes place in the case of "closed places, whose interior is thereby made accessible."<sup>26</sup> A textual variant is found in the Koine, C, and pl. which add αὐτῷ after the verb, "the heavens were opened to Him." It is absent in Nestle's text, but Bruce and Meyer include it. It does not seem to have sufficient basis for being included, nor would it add much meaning to the thought. Though Jesus alone may have seen the heavens opened, John also saw the Spirit descending, and the parallels in Mark and Luke have no reference that would suggest including αὐτῷ.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Arndt-Gingrich, *op. cit.*, p. 599.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

Jesus, the subject of the opening clause in verse 16, is subject also in the next verb, εἶδεν. Another minor variant appears here; both πνεῦμα and θεοῦ have the definite article. But the sense in either case is the same and the reading without the articles seem to be the correct one. The present participles καταβαῖνον and ἐρχόμενον describe not only what Jesus saw, but what actually happened. God anointed Him with the Holy Ghost and with power (Acts 10:38). Much discussion has been aroused by the phrase ὡς ἐν πτεροῦσιν. Did the Spirit come "as" a dove, in that shape and form, or did the spirit descend like a dove? And why, in either case, as a "dove"? The particle ὡς denotes comparison and may be translated "as, like, (something) like, lit., 'as if'."<sup>27</sup> That Luke says, (Luke 3:22) "the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove," is evidence that it was a visible appearance, and suggests that the particle expresses more than a comparison to the manner in which a dove might descend. Lenski uses the term "dovelike form," and he feels that the dove was "intended to convey the idea of the graciousness of the Spirit."<sup>28</sup> Arndt suggests: "The dove is a symbol of purity and Peace, and hence its form does serve very well in a manifestation of God's Holy Spirit, who represents the highest purity and brings true peace into human hearts."<sup>29</sup> There are other interpretations, but since the text itself does not suggest any particular explanation, we

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<sup>27</sup>Arndt-Gingrich, op. cit., p. 907.

<sup>28</sup>Lenski, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>29</sup>William F. Arndt, The Gospel According to St. Luke (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 120.

believe it best not to indulge in too much conjecture.

But Matthew says still more in his account. What follows in his account is also something to make men wonder, so that the evangelist continues, *καὶ ἰδοὺ*, and then describes the next manifestation, "a voice from heaven." The noun *φωνή* stands alone, the verb being understood. The preposition *ἐκ* implies "from within," God speaking from out of the opened heavens.<sup>30</sup> Another variant occurs at the end of this clause, where some manuscripts add *πρὸς αὐτόν*. But we again follow Hestle in disregarding it. To include it would virtually necessitate another change, so that the next clause would begin with *σὺ εἶ* instead of with *οὗτός ἐστιν*. Although Mark and Luke "record the words as being addressed to Jesus, 'Thou art my Son, the Beloved,' etc., which we regard as the actual form in which they were spoken, Matthew writes, 'This is . . . ' and intends the words for us."<sup>31</sup> Generally, the same manuscripts which add the variant *πρὸς αὐτόν* begin the next clause with *σὺ εἶ* rather than with *οὗτός ἐστιν*. But most authorities agree that in Matthew the text should remain as it is.

The closing clause, which reproduces the words spoken by the Voice, deserves special consideration, because it clearly reflects certain passages of the Old Testament, Is. 42:1 and Ps. 2:7. On the one hand, as Bruce notes, "the voice recalls and in some measure echoes Is. 53:1, 'Behold My servant, I uphold Him; My chosen one, My soul delights in Him. I have put My spirit upon Him,'" on the other, "The title 'Son' recalls

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<sup>30</sup>Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

Ps. 2:7.<sup>32</sup> Commenting on the message spoken by the Voice out of heaven,

Plummer says:

Both Mark and Luke have 'Thou art My Son,' which some authorities have in Matthew also; and this form implies that the voice had a special meaning for the Messiah, and was not meant for John alone. And, as addressed to John, it tells him of the Messiahship, rather than of the Divinity of Jesus.<sup>33</sup>

He continues by indicating that the statement may be taken in three ways:

1) This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; 2) This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased; 3) This is My Son, the Beloved in whom I am well pleased. The chief point is whether 'the beloved' is a separate title, indicating the Messiah. In any case there seems to be a reference to the Son of God promised in Ps. 2:7 . . . .<sup>34</sup>

Cecil John Cadoux, in his work The Historic Mission of Jesus, asserts that "the term 'the Beloved' is almost equivalent to 'the only', and was a current Messianic appellation," and he adds that the original wording of the Lucan parallel definitely suggests a quotation of Ps. 2:7.<sup>35</sup> In Mark and in the Alexandrian text of Luke the heavenly voice proclaims Jesus as *ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα* and this prompts G. W. H. Lampe to comment:

Whereas in the 'Western' reading in Luke, Jesus is greeted in the purely Messianic terms of Ps. 2:7 (which was a regular proof-text for the Messiahship of Jesus), the version [ ] given by Mark strongly suggests that Jesus is designated God's Son in words which indicate that His Sonship and Messiahship are to be interpreted in terms of the role of the Second Isaiah's Servant of Yahweh. The Messianic 'Thou art my Son' of Ps. 2:7, is combined with an echo in the words

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<sup>32</sup>Bruce, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>33</sup>Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), p. 34.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Cecil John Cadoux, The Historic Mission of Jesus (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1943), p. 89.

ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα of the first Servant poem (Is. 42:1) together with a passage (Is. 44:2) which would be read in the first century as an integral part of the Servant prophecies.<sup>36</sup>

At this point we wish to refer to the observations of Oscar Cullmann, whose views regarding the significance of Christ's baptism will receive more attention later. Commenting on differences between the Gospel accounts, and the Old Testament passages from which the quotations are taken, he says:

In the synoptic account of Mark and Matthew (Mark 1:10f. and Matt. 3:16f.) and, according to well-attested versions, also Luke (3:22) . . . the proclamation of the heavenly voice: "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" . . . consists in a citation from Is. 42:1. That is, we here have a reference to the Ebed-Jahwe songs. The servant of God, who must suffer vicariously for his people, is in this manner addressed in the Old Testament.<sup>37</sup>

After taking note of the variant from the manuscript D found in the Lucan text, which appears to be a citation from Ps. 2:7, rather than from Is. 42:1, Cullmann states that the Mark-Matthew version is to be preferred here, and that

Christ at his Baptism is not yet proclaimed King but only the servant of God. His Lordship appears later, after his resurrection; but first of all he has to complete the work of the suffering Servant of God in direct connection with the meaning of Johnine baptism, and in fulfillment of this meaning.<sup>38</sup>

As further evidence for his conclusion that the declaration of the heavenly voice is definitely related to Is. 42:1, Cullmann observes:

The form of words of the heavenly voice in the Greek diverges from Is. 42:1 only in one respect. *παις* would be the correct rendering of the Hebrew abdi, 'my servant,' and this correct translation ap-

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<sup>36</sup>G. W. E. Lampo, The Seal of the Spirit (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1951), pp. 36-7.

<sup>37</sup>Cullmann, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

pears in the quotation of the same passage in Matt. 12:17. But instead of *παῖς*, it is *υἱός* that stands here. The affinity of the Greek words *παῖς* and *υἱός* and the connection of the Hebrew words *bachir* and *jachid* with the Greek roots *ἁγαπητός*, *ἐκλεκτός* and *πρωτογενής* suggest that Jesus was first addressed as *υἱός* in the Greek translation of Is. 42:1, while in the Semitic original he is designated as *ebed*, servant, which corresponds with the text of Is. 42:1. This possibility must certainly be reckoned with, especially at John 1:34, a passage which . . . offers as a well-attested variant not the word *υἱός* but *ἐκλεκτός*, which is the usual translation in the Septuagint for the Hebrew *bachir*, by which the *ebed* of God is designated in Is. 42:1. But even if the Hebrew form of the heavenly voice already contained the word 'Son,' in contrast to Is. 42:1, still the rest of the context refers to Is. 42:1, the well-known beginning of the *Ebed-Jahwe* song, and Jesus is then designated Son, in so far as, in the role of Servant of God, he takes the guilt of his people [ ] upon himself in his suffering and death. For he who is addressed in Is. 42:1 has certainly to fulfill the mission which is more closely described in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah.<sup>39</sup>

Although Cullmann's suggestion is noteworthy, we believe that when Jesus is designated as Son, this involves more than that "He takes the guilt of his people upon himself in his suffering and death." He is God's Son. He may be called the true Israel, who obeyed the will of God which men so often disobeyed.

In his commentary on the passage, Lenski urges the importance of noting both the divine and the human nature of Jesus. He writes:

Unless we see the God-man in Jesus we shall fail to see why God should here call from heaven that this is his Son, the Beloved . . . . The announcement deals with the Son *ἕνεκεν* with the Son as incarnate in Jesus, and with him as now entering on his Messianic work.<sup>40</sup>

Lenski also proposes that the aorist *ἐδόξαρεν* is historical, going back to the moment when God selected His Son for the redemptive work, and when the Son accepted that work, and so he translates: "in whom I was well

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>40</sup> Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

pleased."<sup>41</sup> However, Arndt seems to present a stronger case for translating the verb as a present; in his notes on the same word in the Lucan parallel, he writes:

The aorist εὐδοκῆσα has received various interpretations; (a) It has been regarded as the gnomic aorist; (b) it has been viewed as the representation of the Aramaic (Hebrew) 'perfect', the assumption being that the language used was Aramaic; (c) it has been called the ingressive aorist. Of these explanations (b) is here preferred. In Matt. 12:16, where Is. 42:1 is quoted with reference to Jesus, the same form occurs, God being the speaker. The Hebrew original (the LXX differs) has a 'perfect' form; we translate with the present tense.<sup>42</sup>

#### The Markan Account (Mk. 1:9-11)

In Mark, the baptism of Jesus is described in brief, action-filled terms. Interpreters take note of this. In his discussion of Jesus' baptism and its relation to the original circumstances, J. M. Creed maintains that "the Markan account is clearly the most primitive. If it rests on authentic information, it must be derived from Jesus himself."<sup>43</sup> It may well be that our Lord discussed the event with his disciples. Some of them may also have been disciples of the Baptist and might have been present themselves at the event. At any rate, we do not accept Creed's indirect question about "authentic information," with its implied attack upon the reliability of Scripture. Also Bruce seems to suggest similar critical views, when he writes that "the manner in which the baptism is reported is the first instance of realism of this Gospel," and that,

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>42</sup>Arndt, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>43</sup>J. M. Creed, The Gospel According to St. Luke (London: MacMillan and Company), p. 55.

compared with Luke, "who is influenced by religious decorum", the facts about Jesus are reported (by Mark) in a "naked manner."<sup>44</sup> The Markan account (1:9-11) reads as follows:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit coming down upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."

The rather indefinite designation of time, *ἐν ἐκεῖναις ταῖς ἡμέραις* (Matthew has *τότε*) suggests that this happened during the midst of John's activity. At that time, Jesus came, traveling from his home at Nazareth in Galilee, where he had spent his childhood and youth. The phrase "In those days" can also be a Biblical device for referring to redemptive time.

Mark says nothing about the purpose of Jesus coming to John, as Matthew does, but proceeds at once to the action: *καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη*. No mention is made of any specific mode, nor does the use of *εἰς* indicate a submersion into the water. However, Bruce comments that "the expression is pregnant, the idea of descending into the river being latent in *εἰς*."<sup>45</sup> Unlike Matthew, Mark does not identify John with the title *ὁ βαπτιστής* (Matt. 3:1), nor does Mark say anything about John's reluctance to baptize Jesus and the answer which Jesus gave him. But Mark's silence on this point does not warrant the statement by Bruce that "it does not even appear whether John had any suspicion that the visitor from Nazareth was *ὁ ἰσχυρότερός*, of whom he had spoken."<sup>46</sup>

The rapid-fire style of Mark continues in verse 10 in the phrase

<sup>44</sup>Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*



καὶ εὐθύς. The Textus Receptus has εὐθέως, but Bruce correctly observes that "the best texts have εὐθύς uniformly in Mark."<sup>47</sup> The present participle ἀναβαίνων with ἔκ gives no explicit indication that Jesus was immersed, but simply describes the action and indicates the place from which Jesus went up. Mark does not have the exclamation found in Matthew, but by placing the verb εἶδεν before σχιζομένουσ τοὺσ οὐρανοὺσ, leaves no room for doubt that Jesus saw the heavens rent. Lenski, who follows the Textus Receptus and has εἶδε, suggests that "εἶδε refers to the sight of the eyes not to an impression (Eindruck) in the inner consciousness with no objective reality outside of it."<sup>48</sup> Of special significance is the use of the present participle σχιζομένουσ. Plummer describes it as

a graphic expression, which is the more remarkable because there seems to be no other example of this verb . . . being used in rending the heavens. Here both Matthew and Luke have the Old Testament verb, which was evidently in common use for the opening of the heavens, (Mt.: ἠνεύχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί); compare John 1:51; Acts 10:11; Rev. 4:1. So also in the Septuagint: Is. 64:1, Ezek. 1:1, which is perhaps the earliest example of the idea of the heavens being opened. In Gen. 7:11 the windows of heaven are opened for the rain, and in Ps. 78:23 the doors of heaven for the manna, but that is not the same idea; nevertheless there also the same verb is used. The Testaments of the XII Patriarchs exhibit the same constant usage: Lev. 2:6, 5:1, 18:1; Judah 24:2. The last two passages are Messianic, and are strikingly parallel to the Gospel narrative. "The heavens shall be opened, and from the temple of glory shall come upon him sanctification, with the Father's voice as from Abraham to Isaac. And the glory of the Most High shall be uttered over him, and the spirit of understanding and sanctification shall rest upon him (in the water)." The last three words are probably a Christian interpolation of early date.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1961). p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> Plummer, op. cit., p. 32.

The word seems more descriptive than ἀνοίγει employed by Matthew and Luke. The variant ἡνολυμένους is not well supported.

The description of the descent of the Spirit also differs somewhat from the account in Matthew and in Luke. Mark has τὸ πνεῦμα while Matthew has πνεῦμα θεοῦ without the article and Luke has τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. Again, Mark has ἡς, Matthew ὡσεὶ. Variant readings at the end of verse 10 have ἐπὶ αὐτόν instead of εἰς αὐτόν, and the addition of καὶ μένων. But we follow the reading by Nestle.

In verse 11, which gives the message spoken by the heavenly Voice, the words addressed to the Son are in the second person, but in Matthew the words are spoken in the third person. The possible reference to the Servant Songs of Isaiah has been discussed above.<sup>50</sup> The verbal adjective ὁ ἀγαπητός, beloved, according to Arndt-Gingrich inclines strongly toward the meaning only-beloved.<sup>51</sup> Lenski comments as follows:

The verbal adjective ὁ ἀγαπητός is added by a second article. This makes the verbal a kind of apposition and, in fact, a climax to ὁ υἱός . . . . Like most verbals, ἀγαπητός is passive with the Father as the agent. The verb ἀγαπᾶν, from which this verbal is derived, denotes the highest type of love, that which is coupled with full comprehension and understanding and is accompanied by corresponding purpose . . . . The verb φιλεῖν indicates the love of affection, and while it is also proper as expressing the love that exists between the Father and the Son, it expresses far less than ἀγαπᾶν. It cannot be used at all when the object is unworthy . . . . The Father loved Jesus by comprehending all that Jesus was doing and with the purpose of seconding his every act.<sup>52</sup>

Thus in a unique and singular sense, Jesus is declared to be the Beloved Son.

<sup>50</sup>Supra, p. 16ff.

<sup>51</sup>Arndt-Gingrich, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>52</sup>Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel, p. 52.

## The Lucan Account (Lk. 3:21-22)

Although the third Synoptist describes the baptism in fewer words than either Matthew or Mark, he nevertheless adds details which neither of them include in their accounts. The passage in Luke reads as follows:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."

Verse 21 begins with  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$  coupled with the accusative aorist passive preceded by  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$  and the definite article. The noun clause in construction with  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$  answers to a Hebrew idiom. In this case the noun clause is the subject of  $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$ . According to J. H. Moulton, this construction represents more closely the Hebrew manner of speech.<sup>53</sup> The construction  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$  governing the infinitive with  $\tau\tilde{\omega}$  is most commonly temporal, and occurs frequently in Luke.<sup>54</sup> Arndt suggests that this construction views "the many baptisms that John performed on a number of successive occasions as one act."<sup>55</sup> In one way, the phrase  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \tau\tilde{\omega}\ \beta\alpha\pi\tau\iota\sigma\theta\eta\eta\upsilon\alpha\iota\ \kappa\tau\lambda.$  may be considered parallel to the genitive absolute  $\text{I}\eta\sigma\upsilon\upsilon\ \beta\alpha\pi\tau\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$  in which case  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  would simply mean "and"; but if the word  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  is interpreted here as meaning "also", then the baptism of Jesus receives more emphasis. We believe that  $\beta\alpha\pi\tau\iota\sigma\theta\eta\eta\upsilon\alpha\iota$  implies action antecedent to

<sup>53</sup> James Hope Moulton, An Introduction to the Study of New Testament Greek, fifth edition revised by H. G. Hecchan (New York: Mac Millan Co. 1955), p. 141.

<sup>54</sup> Ernst Dewitt Burton, Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, third edition, 1898), p. 162.

<sup>55</sup> Arndt, op. cit., p. 121.

*Βαπτισθέντος*. The participle clause used to report the baptism would suggest that Luke is more interested with what followed than with the baptism itself. On the phrase *ἄπαντα τὸν Ἰσραὴλ* Arndt writes, "When Luke says that all the people were baptized, his words must not be pressed to mean that every Jew requested baptism; he is using popular speech."<sup>56</sup> At this point Luke adds the detail that Jesus was praying, *προσευχόμενος*, a fact not recorded in the accounts of Matthew and Mark. Other differences that might be noted here are the lack of reference to the place of baptism, and that Jesus came to John from Galilee and John's reluctance to baptize Jesus. Nor does Luke explicitly indicate who baptized Jesus, although the context certainly suggests that it was John. Although Luke uses the same verb as Matthew when telling about the opening of heaven, the form is different. He has *ἀνεψυχῆθηκε* aorist passive infinitive whereas Matthew has *ἠνεώχθησαν* and he uses the singular *τὸν οὐρανόν* where Matthew and Mark both have the plural.

The accusative with the infinitive, caused by the *ἔγένετο*, continues into the next verse. Luke again adds a new detail by describing the descent of the Holy Spirit in a bodily form, *σωματικῶ εἶδελ*. Arndt observes that while the coming of the Spirit as a dove is related by all four Evangelists, "the expression 'bodily form' helps to bring out that something visible occurred."<sup>57</sup> The dative may be taken as the dative of means, and adds weight to the conclusion that it was in a visible, dove-like form that the Holy Spirit descended. Luke's *τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον* seems an explicit reference to the third Person of the Holy Trinity.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Arndt notes that "as to the voice from heaven, Mark and Luke have exactly the same text, while Matthew reports the voice as speaking not to Jesus, but about Him."<sup>58</sup> He also adds a very helpful footnote on the variant reading: *υἱός μου εἰ σὺ, ἔγω σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε* • saying:

The reading of most L78 represents the translation given above (that based on the text as Nestle has it). But Z, Streeter, Hauck are of the opinion that another reading deserves the preference, the words of Ps. 2:7 (LXX) . . . . According to the principles of textual criticism which I follow, this reading does not deserve the preference. It was found in Rome and Carthage, but the tradition of Alexandria, Caesarea, and Antioch is against it. It is true that copyists were inclined to assimilate the various Gospels one to the other wherever there appeared to be a discrepancy, but it is hard to see why a copyist should have [ ] felt that the words of Ps. 2:7 should be dropped, if the manuscript which he reproduced contained them. Assuming that these words are not genuine, how shall we account for their reproduction in so many Western manuscripts. An easy conjecture is that somebody had put the words of Ps. 2:7 on the margin as an appropriate parallel and that the copyist, baffled by the existence of what appeared two readings and of which the marginal one could be assumed to be a correction, adopted the latter as the genuine one.<sup>59</sup>

Before leaving the Lucan account we may note here an interesting suggestion from Edersheim. Referring to the fact that Jesus "was praying" Edersheim says: "One prayer, the only one which He taught His disciples, recurs to our minds."<sup>60</sup> While this is only conjecture, it is interesting to note how appropriate the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer would have been at this point in the life of Jesus.

#### The Johannine Reference (Jn. 1:29-34)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 121-22.

<sup>60</sup> Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1907) Eighth edition revised, I, 283 •

Although the fourth Gospel does not describe the actual baptism of Jesus, the passage in chapter 1:29-34 certainly refers to the descent of the Spirit which immediately followed that event. And in the witness which John the Baptist provides here, we have an important statement which is helpful in understanding the significance of the baptism of Jesus. The passage reads:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me! I myself did not know him: but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.'" And John bore witness, "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

The opening phrase *τῆς ἐπικύριον* refers to the interview with the deputation from Jerusalem. It may have been almost six weeks since that day when Jesus had first come to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him, for the Synoptists tell us that after His baptism, "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan . . ." (Mark 1:12-13 and parallels). The important thing in John's witness as preached in the fourth Gospel, was not the time and occasion when Jesus was baptized by the Baptist, nor even that He was baptized, but what happened in connection with that baptism. The Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism, published by the Church of Scotland, points up that significance when it compares the account in John's Gospel with the accounts in the Synoptics:

All the Gospels speak of the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, and all speak of John's Baptism not for its own sake, but for its relation to the Gospel. It is spoken of as the beginning of the Gospel (Mark 1:1f). There are differences between the account of the Synoptic Gospels and that of the Fourth Gospel. The Synoptics speak of John's preaching and Baptism before the Baptism of Jesus,

while the Fourth Gospel speaks of John's preaching and Baptism in the full light of the Baptism of Jesus. All the Gospels speak of the Baptism of Jesus in terms implying the Trinity, that is, of the Voice of God, of Christ as the Son, and of the Spirit . . . . All of them speak of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ at His Baptism, but whereas in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus' baptizing with Spirit is spoken of in the future tense . . . in the Fourth Gospel it is in the present tense (John 1:33). Though there is a difference between the Synoptic account of John's Baptism and that of the Fourth Gospel, they are essentially complementary. The main interest in all of them is the Baptism of Jesus, and the significance of that event for the Gospel.<sup>61</sup>

Thus to understand John 1:29-34, we need to keep in mind at the outset what John had seen. Duncan observes:

The significance attaching to the Baptist, however, is not that he administered water-baptism to Jesus, but that he was a witness to the descent of the Spirit. Apparently, therefore, the descent of the Spirit was not a purely subjective experience in the soul of Jesus; it was something which the Baptist saw, and to which he felt himself called to bear testimony.<sup>62</sup>

John's testimony, "Behold, the Lamb of God" involves such vast concepts that we cannot deal with it here, and because these words do not refer to the Baptism of Jesus, we shall avoid any comment on them.

In verse 31, and again in verse 35, the Baptist says *ἵδεν*. Some commentators hold that John did not know Jesus at all prior to the time when Jesus came to be baptized by him, while others believe that John did not previously know Him as the Messiah, nor recognize His divine greatness. Though no one can say with certainty how well John knew Jesus before His baptism, his reluctance to perform the baptism (Matt. 3:14) indicates to us that he was acquainted with Him. But the purpose of

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<sup>61</sup> Church of Scotland, Special Commission on Baptism, Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism (Edinburgh: Blackwell, 1955), p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> George S. Duncan, Jesus, Son of Man (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949), p. 90.

John's mission was to prepare the way for Christ. That Jesus might be made manifest *φανερωθῆ* on that account, *διὰ τοῦτο*, he came baptizing with water. Lenski comments:

The *ἵνα* clause is placed forward for emphasis and is made doubly emphatic by the summary of it in *διὰ τοῦτο*: for this very reason that he should be made manifest did John come baptizing. The aorist *φανερωθῆ* denotes a purpose actually accomplished not one merely attempted.<sup>63</sup>

The testimony of John in verses 32-34 is a direct reference to what John witnessed immediately after Jesus had been baptized. The verb *τεθεῖκα* (perfect tense) indicates that John still recalled what he had beheld at that event. Some people doubt that an actual dove was visible, but we believe that also the accounts of the Synoptists indicate that the descent of the Spirit was visible, seen by Jesus and by John as well. The *ὡς* in verse 34 supports our conviction in this matter. This does not mean, as Lenski points out, "that the Baptist saw 'a dove'; what he saw was 'as a dove,' a bodily form indeed, but one that was 'as' a dove."<sup>64</sup> John does not say that he heard the voice from heaven, but the witness that he gives to Jesus *οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ* may be a reference to the pronouncement of the heavenly Voice. Thus the significance of the baptism of Jesus is to be found not only in this that He was baptized with water by John, but also in this that at His baptism, as He came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and the voice of God the Father declared that He was His beloved Son. This marvelous event will be discussed more fully in chapter four.

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<sup>63</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942) p. 131.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 135.



## CHAPTER III

### AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF THE BAPTISM OF JOHN

#### The Origin of John's Baptism

Although this thesis does not pretend to offer an exhaustive study of the person and work of that last of the Old Testament prophets, who for the distinctive act that accompanied his preaching was called "the Baptist", nevertheless a brief review of the life of John, the son of Zacharias, and of his work should prove helpful in our effort to determine the significance of the baptism of Jesus, who of his own accord submitted to the baptism of John. The son of aged Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth, John had been sent by God to be the forerunner of the Messiah. He entered upon a ministry "for which he had been intended and prepared even before his birth, Luke 1:15-17; 42-44; 76-77."<sup>1</sup> After spending his early years in seclusion in the wilderness near his home, west of the Dead Sea, he appeared as a preacher along the banks of the Jordan in the year 28 A.D.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in the wilderness of Judea (Matt. 3:1) he seems to have gradually worked his way north, through the El Ghor or Jordan Valley, until he arrived at Bethabara (John 1:28), a ford of the Jordan above Beth-shean and near the Sea of Galilee, about twenty miles from

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<sup>1</sup>P. E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), I, 13.

<sup>2</sup>John B. Davis, "John the Baptist," The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible (Revised edition; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1944), p. 318.

Nazareth.<sup>3</sup>

Some question has been raised whether or not John had been associated with the Essenes, or possibly had even lived with them during the days of his youth. Although there is no Scriptural evidence that John ever had any outward contact with them, there is a possibility that he knew them, and perhaps was even a member of their community for a while. If his aged parents had died when he was still young, it could be, as Brownlee suggests, that John was raised by the Essenes in the Qumran community, and that when he finally felt that their separation from society and secret teachings kept them from being a "voice", that "he turned his back upon them and went out to become that voice. He did not forsake the wilderness, but he found places in the wilderness where he could meet people and preach to them."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Edersheim points out that neither his dress nor his food was that of the Essenes.<sup>5</sup> But the Essenes were known to have practiced ritual washings of various kinds, including what Brownlee describes as an "initial bath" taken by one who was admitted into the community, and if John had been affiliated or even acquainted with such a group, that might help to explain his own use of the baptismal rite.<sup>6</sup>

Before proceeding further into an investigation of the possible

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Fahling, The Life of Christ (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> W. H. Brownlee, "John the Baptist in the New Light of Ancient Scroll," in The Scrolls and the New Testament, edited by Krister Stendahl (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1901), I, 264.

<sup>6</sup> Brownlee, op. cit., p. 38.

origin of John's baptism, we ought to consider his calling or work, of which baptism was the unique and distinguishing mark. We believe that it is safe to assume John had learned as a child some of the extraordinary details connected with his birth. But how much did he know, and how well did he understand the nature and importance of his work? He worked with a sense of urgency, and the answer given to those sent by the Jews to ask him about his work (John 1:19-20) indicated a clear conviction that he had been sent by God, to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. Thus T. W. Manson tries to recapture the thoughts of John when he says:

John received a prophetic "call." He found himself irresistibly caught up by the mighty current of the divine activity in human affairs, appointed to tasks which he dared not refuse, furnished with a message which he must at all costs deliver. He knew that God was "making history", and that God would use him in the making of it. For John the religious life no longer meant the solemn ritual of the Temple, which was his hereditary vocation. Nor did it mean quiet meditation on the inherited treasures of Israel's devotional life, or mystical union with the Absolute. Rather it meant that he was apprehended by God the king, and that the divine authority and power entered into him and worked through him as he yielded himself to them.<sup>7</sup>

Just as John's "prophetic call" may rightly be called a divine summons, so also the message that he proclaimed was the declaration of God. The message included both warnings and admonitions, as well as a call to repentance, but basic to it all was the announcement of the approach of the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus Duncan describes the burden of John's preaching when he says:

He sounded aloud, it is true, his proclamation of judgment and his call to repentance; but it is also true that he declared to men God's purposes of Salvation, thus taking his stand in the one direct line of succession that linked him, on the one hand, with the greatest of his prophetic predecessors, and, on the other, with that Holy One

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<sup>7</sup>T. W. Manson, The Servant-Messiah (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953), p. 88.

for whose coming he served, in the providence of God, to prepare the way.

That, of course, was John's work. He was sent to prepare the way. He did not seek to establish a new religious body. Manson observes:

John's mission was not an end in itself. It is clear that he regarded it as the preliminary to something greater. His part was to prepare Israel to meet her God. The fundamental principles and motives of his work are thus incompatible with the idea of founding a new sect. John's business was not to found a new Judaism but to make better Jews; not to lay down a new code but get more faithful observance of the existing one.<sup>8</sup>

But to do that it was necessary for John to begin to break down the erroneous concepts pertaining to the Kingdom which were so popular at his time. Manson therefore continues his analysis of John's work by saying:

The task of John thus has two aspects. Negatively he had to destroy the confidence that the Messianic hope was a gilt-edged security from which every reasonably good Jew might expect to draw a dividend. Positively -- and it is here that the real greatness of John lies -- he set out to create a New Israel to meet the coming Stronger One. He did not know -- how could he? -- that it would take something thicker than Jordan water to bind the New Israel together, that the New Covenant that would create the New Israel must be sealed in Messianic blood.<sup>10</sup>

However, we should not conclude because of Manson's final remark that the baptism of John was unimportant and ineffective. His employment of the baptismal rite brought him the title of "the baptist", or, "the baptizer". It is worth noting, too, that this designation most likely originated among the Jews themselves, as Schlatter indicates when he says: "Die Benennung Des Johannes als *Βαπτιστής* stammt von der Judentum, nicht erst von der Christenheit . . . Neben *Ἰωάννης* δ

<sup>8</sup>George S. Duncan, Jesus, Son of Man (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 82.

<sup>9</sup>Manson, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

*βαπτίζω* gibt Mat. mit *βαπτιστής* das Palästinische.<sup>11</sup>

But now the question arises: "Where did John get the idea of baptism as a distinctive part of his ministry?" It does not seem likely that the use of Baptism first originated with John, and it is evident that there were ceremonial washings prescribed in the Old Testament (Ex. 29:4; 30:20; 40:12; Lev. 16:26-28 et. alii.). Furthermore, Flemington observes: "The use by New Testament writers of *βαπτίζω* and its cognates of John's baptism, without any attempt to explain their meaning, is most intelligible if some similar rite were already in widespread use."<sup>12</sup>

This does not mean that John's baptism was not a divine institution, nor that its significance was not new or unique. The remark of Edersheim is very pertinent: "What John preached, that he also symbolized by a rite which, though not in itself, yet in its application, was wholly new."<sup>13</sup> The willingness of the Jews to accept this rite without further explanation does suggest that there was good precedent for the practice. But authorities do not agree as to what that precedent was.

Generally speaking, there are two possibilities from which John could have developed the rite of baptism as it was employed by him: the Levitical purifications mentioned in the Old Testament, and the baptism of proselytes. Although Fahling asserts that John's baptism was completely new, and not something to be confused with either of the above

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<sup>11</sup>D. A. Schlatter, Der Evangelist Matthäus (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1929), p. 53.

<sup>12</sup>W. F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London S. P. C. K., 1953), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>Edersheim, op. cit., p. 273.

mentioned possibilities, his position does not have much to support it.<sup>14</sup> The possibility of a derivation from proselyte baptism is also discounted by A. B. Bruce, who declares: "John's baptism was partly or wholly an originality, not to be confounded with proselyte baptism, which perhaps did not even exist at that time."<sup>15</sup> More recently, however, many scholars are of the opinion that the practice of baptising proselytes was already in force when John appeared, and that he adapted the rite in his own ministry in a unique way. Flemington, for example, admits that there is no mention of proselyte baptism in the Old Testament or in the Apocrypha, but he goes to considerable length to demonstrate that proselyte baptism was an established practice when John began his work, and that its "once and for all" character and its significance as an act associated with the transition from one life to another all point strongly to the possibility of its being the antecedent of Christian baptism.<sup>16</sup> And though he also points out several differences between the baptism of proselytes and John's baptism, he concludes: "If these striking differences are clearly recognized, there is no reason why the link between the two should not also be acknowledged."<sup>17</sup>

This does not mean that the proselyte baptism is the only possible precedent on which John may have drawn. Manson suggests that John's

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<sup>14</sup>Fahling, op. cit., pp. 136-37.

<sup>15</sup>A. B. Bruce, The Synoptic Gospels in The Expositor's Greek Testament, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), I, 79.

<sup>16</sup>Flemington, op. cit., pp. 4-7.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

baptism may have been of Jewish origin, modelled on the washings prescribed in the Law; or, that it was an adaptation of the ritual of immersion undergone by proselytes to Judaism; or that it was borrowed from the lustrations of the Essenes, or some pagan ritual, Hellenistic or oriental.<sup>18</sup> But Manson himself believes that there is no evidence which allows one to link John with Essenism or with any pagan religion. He concludes:

If we confine the search to Judaism, the most likely of all the Jewish lustrations is the proselytes' immersion; and that for two reasons. First, the proselytes' immersion differs from the other Jewish washings in that it is a once-for-all rite that is not repeated; and in this respect it agrees with John's baptism, which equally seems to have been administered once only to each postulant. Secondly, the derivation of John's rite from the proselytes' immersion determines the kind of ideas to be associated with John's baptism; and those ideas fit admirably into the general picture of John's convictions and expectations.<sup>19</sup>

Other writers have expressed the same opinion, especially when discussing what they believe to be the distinctive nature of John's baptism. Thus we find this statement by White:

Baptism entered Christianity through John, already a fundamentally ethical idea, deriving ultimately from Judaist ceremonial washings, with associations of ritual holiness, and from the baptism of proselytes, which involved very definite renunciations. John's "Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" underlines this ethical implication. The revolution in John's teaching is his requirement of Baptism from Jews, his insistence that for entrance to Messiah's Kingdom descent from Abraham (signaled in circumcision) was utterly irrelevant. The Baptism of repentance is thus deliberately set over against circumcision, and it is, of course, just this new ethical Baptism which Jesus Himself undergoes and practices at the hands of His disciples.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Manson, op. cit., pp. 42-3.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>20</sup>R. E. White, "Some Important Issues for Baptismal Theology," The Expository Times, LXI (January, 1950), 111.

Assuming that there is a connection between the baptism of proselytes and John's baptism, Brownlee asserts:

The originality of John would be in his insistence that this rite be applied, not only to proselytes, but to persons who were born Jews. If so, this would imply that the whole nation was apostate and sinful and if it was to become the people of God it must enter the society of God's people through repentance and baptism.<sup>21</sup>

Another unique feature of John's baptism is its eschatological significance. Oepke calls attention to this factor in the words:

Ihre Eigenart hat sie aber auch der Proselytentaufe gegenüber in ihrer ganz unpolitischen und unritualistischen, ausgeprägt sittlichen Orientierung, ausserdem in ihrem engen Verhältnis zur Eschatologie. Auch die Proselytentaufe zwar kann wohl einmal eschatologisch begründet und mit einem Bussruf an die Polytheisten verbunden werden, Sib. 4, 165, (533, 20). Diese Wendung liegt dem Judentum an sich nahe. Aber bei Johannes ist die Verbindung wesentlicher und aktueller. Nicht den Weltuntergang hinausschieben ist hier das Anliegen, sondern das Volk für das nahe bevorstehende Kommen Jahwehs bereit zu machen.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the nature of John's baptism can best be understood if we compare it with the Jewish baptism of proselytes, as Flemington does. Pointing out what he calls "obvious similarities between the two rites", Flemington says: "Both use baptism by immersion and both employ flowing water. Again, both rites mark in some sense for those baptized the beginning of a new life and incorporation into a new community."<sup>23</sup> He then proceeds to discuss three striking differences; first, that in proselyte baptism the subject seems to have baptized himself, whereas John administered the rite to the candidates; second, that John included Jews as

<sup>21</sup> Brownlee, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Albrecht Oepke, "B<sup>1</sup>ntu, B<sup>1</sup>nt<sup>1</sup>ju" in Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933), I, 535.

<sup>23</sup> Flemington, op. cit., p. 15.



well as Gentiles in his baptism, whereas the baptism of proselytes had been for Gentiles only; and third, while the baptism of proselytes held importance as a means of ceremonial purification, for John the ceremonial aspect had receded into the background, and it was the moral emphasis that came first with him.<sup>24</sup> Some of these same similarities and points of difference are mentioned by Brownlee, who says:

John's originality would be the great stress upon the once-for-all baptism of the initiatory rite and in extending a public invitation for all to repent and be baptized. John's baptism was also an administered rite, not a self ablution.<sup>25</sup>

According to Flemington, however, the most important difference between proselyte baptism and the baptism of John is that John's baptism "was not only thoroughly 'moral' in its significance, but also thoroughly 'eschatological'. There is the closest connexion between John's baptism and his proclamation of the Kingdom of God."<sup>26</sup> But to understand now what the expression "Kingdom of God" meant for the Jews at the time of John, Flemington suggests that we rid our minds of many of the present day associations of that term, and think of the "Kingdom" as "the divine order, the 'rule of God' which is to supervene upon the present world order."<sup>27</sup> Although man cannot hasten the coming of this Kingdom, John's work was to prepare people for it by calling them to repentance.

If John did derive his baptism from the example of the baptism of proselytes, some might feel that this would be evidence that John used

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-17.

<sup>25</sup>Brownlee, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>26</sup>Flemington, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

immersion as the mode of his baptism. This is one of the "similarities" mentioned by Flemington. However, he fails to furnish evidence that the proselyte baptism was by immersion. Considering the phrases ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ (Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5) and εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην (Mark 1:9), and observing that we learn from John 3:23 that John also baptized in Aizon near Salim because there was much water there (ὕδατα πολλὰ ἦν ἐκεῖ), John Murray remarks:

The expressions used and the consideration mentioned in reference to Aizon, that there was much water there, do not prove that immersion was the mode and the exigencies of immersion were the reasons for choosing Jordan and Aizon . . . . It would have been disrupting to a local community and an interference with their limited water supplies . . . it would be necessary to meet the needs of those who congregated . . . for their own need and for the use of the animals they may have brought.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, if John had developed his baptism from the example of the Jewish purifications rather than from the proselyte baptism, there may then be even stronger reason for believing that he did not baptize by immersion. According to B. F. Atkinson, baptism in the sense of a sprinkling was instituted by God in His law given through Moses. As support for this view, Atkinson cites Hebrews 9:19,22 and the action of St. Paul described in Acts 21:29-26, where the apostle purified himself by "sprinkling the water of purification."<sup>29</sup> Atkinson therefore concludes that such a washing of purification was well known to the Jews, and so they submitted to the baptism of John without question or word of explanation from him.

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<sup>28</sup> John Murray, "Christian Baptism," The Westminster Theological Journal, XIII, 130-31.

<sup>29</sup> F. F. Atkinson, Moses, John, and Christ; The Famous Baptizers (Louisville, Ky.: Herald Press, 1938), pp. 9-10.

While taking into consideration all of the proposals and evidence gathered from the authorities listed above, we should keep in mind also the fact that God Himself may have directed John to baptize, (see Luke 3: 2-4; John 1:6,33) and that through John's own study of the Old Testament Scripture, as well as through direct guidance by the Holy Spirit, God prompted John to administer the baptism that became the distinguishing mark of his ministry.

### The Nature and Purpose of John's Baptism

In the preceding section of this chapter, we considered various sources which may have been the origin of John's baptism. In doing so it was necessary at times to indicate certain differences or similarities, between these sources. We have not attempted to draw any definite conclusion, because Scripture itself does not inform us whether or not John used baptism in imitation of, or in distinction from, any other similar form, but only records that he said God had sent him to baptize (John 1: 33 ). But Scripture does provide information concerning the nature and purpose of his baptism. John came as a herald, proclaiming (κηρύσσειν) the message God had given to him (Luke 3:2-3). Its content was a summons to repentance, and the accompanying baptismal rite is described as a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:33).? In St. Matthew the call to repentance stands alone --μετανοεῖτε-- (Matt.3 :2), and is followed by the response of the people who "were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" (3:6). His message is an admonition to prepare for One who is coming, but only Matthew includes the specific declaration that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" --

ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (3:2). The phrase *βάπτισμα μετάνοιας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν* (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) is really a summary of the Baptist's mission and message, and emphasizes the close connection between baptism and repentance.

In order to understand the importance of John's mission and message, we need to keep in mind that he attracted attention for more than one reason. Manson correctly observes:

John was not the first to preach repentance and moral reformation; he was not the first to make washing a ritual act charged with religious significance; He was not the first to indulge in Messianic propaganda. But he was the first to bring all three things together in an organic unity.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, the keynote of what John said and did was the call to repentance. His great word was *μετανοεῖτε* and his baptism is described as *βάπτισμα μετάνοιας*. Duncan analyzes John's work in this way:

John's first call, according to all the Synoptists, is for repentance. And it is well to remember that to a pious Israelite repentance meant something far more than is implied in the Greek word *metanoia* "change of mind"; it meant a "turning to the Lord God, with an earnest desire to walk in His ways and to obey His will." The same moral earnestness lay behind John's summons to baptism, for baptism was "a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins", and it clearly indicated on the part of the recipient a desire to be cleansed in soul and to make a fresh start in life.<sup>31</sup>

At this point we find that there is a difference of opinion regarding the demands John imposed on those who were baptized. Some scholars suggest that John would not baptise anyone who did not give evidence of sincere repentance; others assert that those who were baptized confessed by such action that they were repentant. Thus we find that Schneider, in

<sup>30</sup>Manson, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>31</sup>Duncan, op. cit., p. 79.

support of the former view, cites Mark 1:5, Matt. 3:7-10, and Luke 3:7, and on the basis of these passages says: "Johannes ist nur dann bereit zu taufen, wenn er gewiss ist, das Früchte der Busse hervorgebracht werden."<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Bruce, commenting on the usage of the participle *ἐξομολογούμενοι* states: "Confession was not exacted as a conditio sine qua non of baptism, but voluntary. The participle means while confessing; not, provided they confessed."<sup>33</sup>

Whether or not John actually demanded evidence of repentance, or was willing to accept as sincere those who submitted to baptism, there can be no doubt about the fact that he called the people to repent. He declared them to be unworthy and in need of purification. Manson writes:

It seems to me that the point -- and it is a very sharp and stinging point -- of John's procedure is that he deliberately invites the children of Abraham to submit to a rite which had been devised for the benefit of pagans. He says in effect: You call yourselves Jews, you claim to be the descendants of Abraham, you demand privileges that belong to Israel. You have no right to the name, no right to the status; you have forfeited all by your wickedness. You have only one chance. You must begin where the unclean Gentile begins -- at the bottom. You must rediscover, and relearn your Judaism from the beginning. Only so can you hope to have any part in the good time that is coming.<sup>34</sup>

Plummer also stresses the importance of the fact that John insisted that the Jews could not enter the Messianic kingdom now so near, Abraham's seed though they might be, without a thorough moral purification, and he connects baptism and repentance when he says: "Those who came to him not

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<sup>32</sup>Johannes Schneider, Die Taufe im Neuen Testament (Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1962), p. 23.

<sup>33</sup>Bruce, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>34</sup>Manson, op. cit., p. 44f.

merely confessed their sins; by submitting to baptism they made a public resolution to renounce them."<sup>35</sup> Such repentance was necessary if they hoped to stand before the imminent judgment of God. Bruce even goes so far as to say that the coming baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire was not a baptism of grace, but one of judgment. He comments: "The *πνεῦμα ἅγιον* is a stormy wind of judgment; holy, as sweeping away all that is light and worthless in the nation . . . (John) baptizes with water, in the running stream of Jordan, to emblem the only way of escape, amendment."<sup>36</sup>

Many authorities proceed in a similar way, and see a definite eschatological significance in John's baptism. Flemington asserts that "two of the most prominent and characteristic features of the Baptist's message are the note of apocalyptic judgment and the linking of baptism with a new moral life."<sup>37</sup> Schneider observes a similar connection between John's call to repentance in baptism and the eschatological approach of the Kingdom, for he says:

Dieser Bussruf hat einen eschatologischen Grund: den nahe bevorstehenden Hereinbruch der Gottesherrschaft. Das ganze Volk soll sich rüsten auf die kommende *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ*. Nur wer die ganze Umkehr vollzieht und ein klares Nein zu seinem bisherigen Leben sagt, wird zu dem Heilsvolk der Endzeit gehören und an dem Reich Gottes teilhaben. Sonst verfällt er dem Zorn Gottes und ist von den eschatologischen Heilsgaben ausgeschlossen.<sup>38</sup>

This eschatological emphasis not only distinguishes John's baptism from

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<sup>35</sup>Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), p. 22.

<sup>36</sup>Bruce, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>37</sup>Flemington, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>38</sup>Schneider, op. cit., p. 22.

proselyte baptism, but it helps us to understand its purpose. It was not simply an initiatory rite. It prepared men for the coming Kingdom. The Interpreter's Bible offers the thought: "John regarded his ritual as being almost like a mark on the forehead; it sealed a man against the day of imminent judgment."<sup>59</sup> In view of this, we might say that John's baptism was a decisive act on the part of those who submitted to it. In that act they recognized their need for cleansing, and accepted John's baptism as the answer to that need.

#### John's Baptism and the Forgiveness of Sins

Although we do not presume to offer here an exhaustive study of John's baptism, particularly its nature and purpose, we are bound to give attention to its results or effects. What were the results? Was the baptism of John a symbolic act only, or was it a sacrament, a means of grace by which God conveyed forgiveness to repentant sinners? If the baptism of John did carry with it the effect of forgiveness, can we identify it with Christian baptism?

Some scholars believe that although John's baptism was more than a ritual of cleansing, it did not actually convey forgiveness. Collins, for example, views it this way:

His baptism was a "baptism of repentance unto remission of sins," that is, it was the sign that sins would be remitted. It was therefore a pledge of safety from the "Wrath to come." In other words, the baptism of John was eschatologically conditioned . . . those

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<sup>59</sup> Sherman E. Johnson and George A. Buttrich, The Gospel according to St. Matthew in The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Bros., c. 1951), VII, 267.

who were baptized with his baptism would certainly be baptized with the Spirit when the time came.<sup>40</sup>

Flemington writes in a similar vein: "Those who had submitted to it could know that their repentance was accepted, their sins would be forgiven, their membership of the future Messianic community was secure."<sup>41</sup> Such statements seem to deny that John's baptism was a means of forgiveness, and instead assert that it was a pledge that forgiveness would come. This line of thought is developed by Lampe, who declares:

It was an 'acted prophecy' a tangible sign of the repentance which purifies the heart, allows the penitent to be numbered among the elect community in the approaching judgment, and prepares him for the reception of the outpouring of the Spirit of Yahweh . . . John's Baptism signified spiritual cleansing and the entry of its recipients into the 'Remnant' community of the Messiah.<sup>42</sup>

The hesitance to say that John's baptism did in fact convey forgiveness to the people who repented and were baptized apparently stems from the view that such forgiveness would be made possible only through the sacrificial death of Christ. Thus Johannes Werns describes John's baptism as a pledge of forgiveness, dependent on the death of Christ:

The baptism of John . . . was more than a merely external Levitical purification; rather it was an outward expression of an inward happening, the acknowledgment of the Divine judgment upon all flesh. But at the same time, it was also the pledge of the forgiveness of sins which God promised upon every true change of mind. But this forgiveness of sins has become possible only through the sacrifice

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<sup>40</sup>Berkeley G. Collins, "The Sacrament of Baptism in the New Testament," The Expository Times, XXVII, 39.

<sup>41</sup>Flemington, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>42</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, The Seal of the Spirit (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1951), p. 22.



of the Lamb, Who bore the sin of the world, and Who in His own baptism by John assumed the place of the sinner.<sup>43</sup>

Basic to all of this is the interpretation of the phrase "baptism for the (2<sup>d</sup>) forgiveness of sins," (Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3), which may also be translated "into the forgiveness of sins." Plummer, who believes that forgiveness was the ultimate result towards which the rite of baptism was preparatory, supports his view by citing the statement of Tertullian that baptism for the remission of sins refers to a future remission, which was to follow in Christ (De. Bapt. x.), and he continues by asking:

If it has been generally understood that John's baptism was a washing away of sins, would our Lord have submitted to it? Its main aspect was a preparation for the Kingdom, and as such it fitted well into the opening of the Messiah's ministry. To every one else this preparation was an act of repentance. The Messiah, who needed no repentance, could yet accept the preparation. John's rite consecrated the people to receive salvation; it consecrated the Messiah to bestow it.<sup>44</sup>

One of the prominent theologians of today whose views generally agree with the preceding line of thought is Markus Barth. In the following excerpts, we note his emphasis on the importance of repentance in the baptism of John. He says:

Wo Busse geschieht, sollen der Busse angemessene Früchte gebracht und sichtbar werden (Matth. 3,8; Luk. 3,8, 10-11). Das bedeutet nicht, dass die Busse zu einem Mittel der geheimen Selbstrechtfertigung wird. Busse ist und bleibt ein göttlicher Befehl und ein göttliches Angebot: sie wird "verkündigt" (Mark 1:4; Luk. 3,3; Apg. 13, 24). Sie meint nicht, dass der Mensch sich irgendwie selbst rechtfertigen könne oder solle. Busse bedeutet aber, dass sich alle selbst so erkennen und betätigen, wie es der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit und dem Gericht entspricht.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Johannes Werns, Baptism, translated from the German by G. H. Lang. (London: Paternoster Press, 1957), p. 20.

<sup>44</sup>Plummer, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>45</sup>Markus Barth, Die Taufe--Ein Sakrament? (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag AG, Zollikon, 1951), p. 114.

For the children of Israel to show such repentance was an act of deep humility, as Barth points out when he says:

Sie ist ein Akt tiefster Demütigung--wohl der tiefsten Demütigung, die ein seiner Herkunft und Verheissung bewusster Israelit sichtbar vollziehen konnte. Diese Demütigung war nicht eine Schrulle des Johannes. Er hatte sie im Namen Gottes verkündigt. Wer sich taufen liess, gab nicht nur Johannes--er gab Gott selbst recht: "Die Gott recht gaben, liessen sich taufen" (Luk. 7,29).<sup>46</sup>

According to Barth, such humility is significant. For although forgiveness is not dispersed through John's baptism, but rather through the Coming One and His gift of the Holy Spirit, the repentance-baptism of John is a request for forgiveness and baptism of the Holy Spirit. He says:

Die Vergebung kann deswegen nicht als Gabe oder Wirkung der Johannestaufe bezeichnet werden, weil sie erst durch den Kommenden bewirkt und zusammen mit der Gabe des Heiligen Geistes gespendet und gewährt wird. Wesentlich gehört es zur Jordantaufer des Johannes, dass sie einmal, und zwar bald, durch die Geisttaufe überboten und erfüllt wird: "Ich taufe euch mit Wasser, er aber wird euch mit dem Heiligen Geist taufen" (Mark 1,8 und Par.). Dieselben Leute, die von Johannes mit Wasser getauft werden, müssen vom Kommenden noch mit Geist getauft werden. Sie werden mit Wasser auf die Vergebung der Sünden und auf die Geisttaufe hin getauft; also auf das Werk hin, welches erst und nur der Kommende vollziehen und vollenden kann. Die Wassertaufer ist in sich nichts Vollkommenes und nicht Abgeschlossenes. Sie ist, was sie ist, nur durch ihre Beziehung auf die Geisttaufe. So ist die Busse nicht echt ohne die erhoffte Vergebung. Die Busse ist nur sinnvoll wegen der Verheissung der Vergebung. Die Busstaufe ist Bitte um die Vergebung und die Vergebung und die Geisttaufe. Die Busstaufe geschieht in der Hoffnung auf die Erfüllung dieser Bitte. Aber erst mit der Gabe des Geistes ist die Gabe der Vergebung direkt verbunden (vgl. Joh. 20,22f., Ps. 51).<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, another contemporary theologian, Johannes Schneider, presents strong statements to the effect that the baptism of John

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

did give forgiveness. Although he does not identify John's baptism with the sacrament of Holy Baptism, he supports its forgiving character when he writes:

Die Taufe vermittelt nicht nur eine rituelle Reinigung; ihre Wirkung geht viel tiefer. Das Ziel, das durch sie erreicht werden soll, ist die Sündenvergebung. Durch die Taufe wird also dem Juden, der zum Jordan kommt, das zuteil, was kein Opfer und keine religiöse Waschung sonst zustande bringt: die Entsündigung, die ihm Eingang in das Reich Gottes sichert.<sup>48</sup>

Schneider also places great emphasis on the part that repentance played in the baptism of John, and outlines his analysis of John's baptism thus:

Durch den Genitiv wird die Taufe des Johannes in ihrer Eigenart charakterisiert. Sie ist eine mit der Busse verbundene Taufe, nicht ein rituelles Reinigungsbad. Das gibt ihr das neue und besondere Gepräge. Es sind also folgende Tatbestände festzustellen: 1. Die radikale Umkehr zu Gott, die sich in Früchten der Busse zeigen muss. Die entschiedene und konsequente Umkehr ist die Voraussetzung für den Vollzug der Taufe. 2. Während der Taufhandlung wird ein Sündenbekenntnis abgelegt. 3. Die Taufe hat die Kraft der eschatologischen Entsündigung. 4. Umkehr und Taufe zusammen sind die Bedingung für den Eingang in das Reich Gottes. 5. Die Taufe ist eine einmalige, unwiederholbare, durch den Täufer vollzogene Handlung. 6. Sie ist kein objektiv wirksames Sakrament, denn sie ist an die bussfertige Bereitschaft des Täuflings gebunden.<sup>49</sup>

While he thus goes beyond the view of Barth, Schneider also recognizes the preparatory nature of John's baptism, as an act anticipating the coming gift of the Holy Spirit. He observes:

Die Taufe des Johannes hat also vorbereitenden Charakter, insofern als sie vor dem Anbruch der Heilszeit liegt und ohne direkte Beziehung zu dem Messias ist. Sie enthält nur den Hinweis auf die messianische Taufe. Die Gabe, die den von Johannes Getauften zuteil wird, ist die Entsündigung, aber nicht die Verleihung des Heiligen Geistes. Erst in den Tagen des Messias wird die Ausgießung des Heiligen Geistes erfolgen.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Schneider, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

When we examine the various views represented above, we realize that none of them agree with the position maintained by Lutheran dogmatists. In many respects, the views above seem to parallel those of Thomasius, as can be seen from the quotations of his works supplied in Pieper's Christian Dogmatics. The following quotation may serve as an example:

The remission of sins granted in John's Baptism was of a somewhat external and preparatory nature, similar to the effect of the Old Testament sacrifices. It did not make the baptized person a member of the kingdom of heaven, but prepared him for it. Thus it was a type of the Baptism of Christ, the place of which it, therefore, could not take.<sup>51</sup>

That such reasoning is still popular today can be seen in the view held by Murray, who, although admitting a similarity of import between the baptism of John and Christian baptism, says:

The character of John's baptism was analogous to the character of his ministry. John prepared the way of the Lord and his ministry was preparatory, transitional, and inductive. So was his baptism. We may no more identify the baptism of John with the ordinance instituted by Christ than we may identify the ministry and mission of John with the ministry and mission of Jesus.<sup>52</sup>

The Lutheran Symbols do not offer an explanation of John's baptism. However, in Part III, article III of the Smalcald Articles, we find a comment on the nature of John's work. There John is called

a preacher of repentance, however, for the remission of sins, i.e., John was to accuse all, and convict them of being sinners, that they might know what they were before God, and might acknowledge that they were lost men, and might thus be prepared for the Lord, to re-

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<sup>51</sup>Francis Pieper, "The Baptism of John the Baptist," Christian Dogmatics, translated by T. Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), III, 289.

<sup>52</sup>Murray, op. cit., p. 107.

ceive grace, and to expect and accept from Him the remission of sins (our emphasis).<sup>53</sup>

Although this statement from the Smalcald Articles does not refer specifically to the baptism of John, his work is described in terms which imply preparatory activity. But the symbols do not suggest that forgiveness was granted through the baptism of John. Instead, it seems to us that the words "to expect and accept from Him (Jesus) the remission of sins" indicate that not even the baptism of John provided such forgiveness.

On the other hand, E. Eckhardt, summarizing the views of various Lutheran dogmaticians, draws the following comparison between the baptism of John and the Baptism ordained by Christ:

Die Johannistaufe war von der Taufe Christi wesentlich nicht verschieden. Sie hatte 1. denselben Ursprung. Sie war von Gott . . . 2. dieselbe Materie . . . 3. dieselbe Wirkung: Vergebung der Sünden. Mark 1:4: predigte: von der Taufe der Busse, zur Vergebung der Sünden. Luk. 3:3; Matth. 3:7: dem Zorn Gottes entrinnen. Joh. 3:5: geboren aus dem Wasser und Geist (damals gab es nur die Johannistaufe). Die Johannistaufe war ein kräftiges Sakrament.<sup>54</sup>

Along similar lines Pieper declares, "According to Scripture, the Baptism of John actually was a means of grace with vis dativa (power to give remission) and vis effectiva (power to effect faith)." He later adds: "The Baptism of John is likewise described as a means through which the Holy Ghost works regeneration," referring to John 3:5.<sup>55</sup> We might note, however that not all people would agree that John 3:5 refers to the baptism

<sup>53</sup>The Smalcald Articles in Triglot Concordia; The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1921), p. 481.

<sup>54</sup>E. Eckhardt, Homiletisches Reallexikon (St. Louis: Success Printing Company, 1914), pp. 840-41.

<sup>55</sup>Pieper, op. cit., p. 288.

of John.

We believe that we must distinguish between John's baptism and Christian Baptism, because the baptism of John bestowed the forgiveness of sins in view of what Christ would do, while Christian Baptism bestows it in view of what Christ has done. Thus, in speaking about Johannine baptism, Oscar Cullmann says: "Its effect was forgiveness of sins."<sup>56</sup> But after this he asserts: "Christian Baptism, when regarded as Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, is no mere reversion to Johannine baptism. It is rather the fulfillment, which becomes possible only through the completed work of Jesus on the Cross."<sup>57</sup> This distinction also receives emphasis from Gerfen, who writes:

John's baptism was a promise, and Christ's baptism the fulfilling of the divine promise. John's baptism included forgiveness of sin in view of the promise of Christ then coming; Christ's baptism actually grants forgiveness of sin by virtue of the fact that He has come. Hence, the relation is that between a promise and its actual fulfillment.<sup>58</sup>

After reviewing John's baptism in the light of these comments, we believe that it is difficult to prove from Scripture that by itself the baptism of John bestowed forgiveness on those who were baptized. We feel that it was a promise of forgiveness, offered in view of the coming Savior, whose perfect obedience and vicarious suffering and death would make such forgiveness possible.

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<sup>56</sup>Oscar Cullman, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 11.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>58</sup>Ernst Gerfen, Baptizein (Columbus, Ohio: F. J. Heer Printing Company, 1908), p. 155.

## CHAPTER IV

### AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

In Chapter Two we endeavored to analyze the textual accounts of the Baptism of Jesus. That analysis was not an attempt to give an interpretation of the passages under consideration. We merely pointed up the specific meaning of words, phrases, and the implications of certain grammatical constructions. Now, however, we must face the matter of exposition squarely. What did the Baptism of Jesus signify? What did it mean to Him? What should it mean to us? In order to answer these questions, we wish to review various interpretations which have been offered, consider again the words of Jesus "fulfill all righteousness", and take into account the importance of the descent of the Spirit and the heavenly Voice.

#### An Introductory Summary of Various Views

Our study of the subject uncovered numerous explanations for the Baptism of Jesus. While some views vary slightly from others, and some overlap with others, it should be helpful to list the more prominent suggestions. The Interpreter's Bible lists three main reasons:

First: Jesus was renouncing, not any guiltiness, but the dear and sheltered life of home, that he might be consecrated to the dangerous mission to which he felt called. Thus at his baptism Christ took up that cross which he carried all his life and on which at the last he died. He forewent his home to become a homeless Man who had "not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20). Second, and perhaps centrally: Jesus at baptism took upon himself the common sin. Thus it became him "to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). John and Jesus may or may not have met until this climactic moment, for John apparently had lived in Judea while Jesus lived in Galilee . . . . Jesus at his baptism took the sin of mankind unto himself, assuredly not to

become party to the sin, but to share the shame and pain; and, by absorbing the sin into the whiteness of his own love, to redeem sinners. He repented with men as man, to redeem men -- in God. Third: Jesus sought baptism because, in a deepening sense of destiny, he knew that God had some commission to lay upon him; and because he believed that the voice of God might come pleadingly, piercingly, and with divine endowment through the ministry of his brave cousin who was disciplined in righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

Although there may be some truth in all the above suggestions, some appear rather shallow. One factor which certainly has contributed to the variety of explanations for Jesus' baptism is His sinlessness. Whether one holds that John's baptism was merely a baptism of repentance, or a sacrament which actually conveyed forgiveness, men find it difficult to understand why Jesus, who is "holy, blameless, unstained" (Hebrews 7:26) should be baptized. In an article entitled "The Baptism of Jesus and His Sinlessness", John W. Voorhis lists four other explanations which have been offered for the baptism of Jesus, and although he finds all of them to be unsatisfactory and inadequate, his listing is helpful in summarizing the variety of views that have been proposed:

a) Jesus was baptized to set an example for others, and lest He offend others by His own failure to be baptized; b) Jesus was baptized because as a man (truly human) He desired to conform to God's will for men around Him; c) Jesus was not baptized for any sin of His own, but vicariously accepted the sin of man and for it vicariously was baptized; and d) Jesus, though personally sinless, yet formally or ceremonially (according to the Levitical Law) was unclean through His union with a sinful people. There was thus ceremonial necessity for Jesus' baptism.<sup>2</sup>

Of these suggestions, the first is probably the least plausible of all.

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<sup>1</sup>Sherman E. Johnson and George A. Buttrick, The Gospel According to St. Matthew in The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon--Cokesbury Press, 1951), VII, 267-68.

<sup>2</sup>John W. Voorhis, "The Baptism of Jesus and His Sinlessness", The Evangelical Quarterly, VII, 47-52.



and Voorhis quickly disposes of it by observing that many people had already come to be baptized, and that Jesus was not yet a public figure so that his baptism could hardly have been of special significance to those who saw it, nor did Jesus, in asking John to baptize Him, mention anything about His wanting to give others such an example.<sup>3</sup>

As Christians who do not question what the Scriptures say of Jesus, we agree with Ross, who says that "Jesus cannot have had any sense of guilt; He was sinless. There had been--there was-- absolutely nothing in His life, the thought of which made Him quail before God or feel unhappy in His Father's presence."<sup>4</sup> However, Rawlinson points out that some try to find a reason for Jesus' baptism in the suggestion that according to Hebrew ideas,

it would be impossible for one who was truly man to be certain of his own sinlessness, since according to the Old Testament and the whole Hebrew point of view sins of ignorance--unconscious sins--were inevitable (cf. Job 4:18-19, 15:15; I Cor. 4:4; Mk. 10:18). Thus there are those who argue seriously that the explanation is found in the Gospel According to the Hebrews as quoted by Jerome: "Lo, the mother of the Lord and his brethren kept saying to him, John the Baptist is baptizing with a view to the remission of sins; let us go and be baptized by him. But he said unto them, What sin have I committed, that I should go and be baptized by him? Unless indeed, this very utterance of mine involves a sin of ignorance."<sup>5</sup>

But the whole testimony of Scripture rules out the idea that it was for any sin of His own, even one of ignorance, that Jesus was baptized. The reluctance of John the Baptist is in itself evidence that Jesus did not

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> D. J. Davies Ross, "The Baptism of Jesus," The Evangelical Quarterly, XVIII (October, 1946), 241.

<sup>5</sup> A. E. J. Rawlinson, The Gospel According to St. Mark, in The Westminster Commentary (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 252.

came to John seeking baptism on account of His own sin, for He had none. Yet even the reluctance of John is given different explanations. Some scholars hold that John had known Jesus from early childhood, and was fully aware of the Messianic nature of Jesus; others assert that John first discovered this at the time of the baptism, or possibly during an interview with Jesus just prior to it. Thus Plummer declares:

The Messiah came expressly to be baptized. It was not because John recognized Him as the Messiah that he was at first unwilling to baptize Him. John had not yet received the sign by which he was to know the Messiah, and until this special revelation was granted to him he was as ignorant as others that Jesus was the Christ (Jn. 1:33). But he baptized no one without a preliminary interview, which in all other cases was a confession of sins as a guarantee of repentance. The preliminary interview with his kinsman from Nazareth convinced John that he was in the presence of One who had no sins to confess, and who therefore, in an unspeakable degree, was morally his superior. It would be far more fitting that he should confess his sins to Jesus and be baptized by Him, the only Sinless One. And Jesus . . . seems to admit that John's plea for an interchange of positions is not a false one . . . but He also knows that what both of them have to do is to fulfill what God has willed. It was God's will that all Israel should be baptized and enter the Kingdom, and God's Son, who claimed no exemption from paying tribute to the Temple (17: 25-26), claims no exemption here.<sup>6</sup>

But Plummer's conjecture that John determined the innocence of Jesus by means of an interview has little to support it, and although it is true that John tells us "I knew Him not" (John 1:33), it may be, as Lenski suggests, that "this implies only that at first the divine assurance had not been given him that Jesus was the Messiah."<sup>7</sup> What we do know is that John, either through previous acquaintance, or some other means, did feel

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<sup>6</sup>Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), p. 30.

<sup>7</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, c. 1943), p. 123.

that it was unnecessary for Jesus to be baptised. Voorhis says: "Not ignorance, then, but knowledge of Jesus caused John's protest," and because his baptism demanded confession and repentance unto remission of sins, "John sought to prevent the baptism of Jesus . . . on the ground of a moral purity that rendered such baptism unnecessary. So far as John was concerned, Jesus had no sin to confess, no reason for repentance, no need for cleansing."<sup>8</sup> For the same reason, the baptism of John had a somewhat different meaning for Jesus than it had for the Jews, as Schneider points out when he says:

Die Johannesstaufe konnte ja für Jesus nicht die Bedeutung haben, die sie für das jüdische Volk hatte. Denn sie war für die Sünder bestimmt, die der Umkehr zu Gott und der Vergebung der Sünden bedürfen. Jesus aber war sündlos.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, as a true Israelite, or, we might say, as the true Israel, Jesus was baptised.

#### Exegetical Comment on the Words of Jesus

It was a voluntary act which led Jesus to John, and moved Him to request baptism. Observing that Jesus does not contradict John's evaluation of the situation, but speaks to him in words which sound like the asking of a favor, Voorhis concludes:

The word "permit" (ἄφες) is certainly significant. It indicates that Jesus consciously asked John to do something which was not necessary . . . . Thus Jesus with John seemed to recognize that the normal reason for baptism did not apply. There was no moral necessity for it . . . . But if the baptism of Jesus was without moral

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<sup>8</sup>Voorhis, op. cit., pp. 29-40.

<sup>9</sup>Johannes Schneider, Die Taufe im Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1952), p. 25.

necessity, then we have reached this conclusion, that morally Jesus' baptism by John was a purely voluntary act.<sup>10</sup>

Herbert J. A. Bouman offers a similar view. In answer to the question,

"Why, then, should He be baptized?" Bouman replies:

He Himself gives the answer: "Suffer it to be so now ( $\delta\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ ); for thus ( $\delta\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$ ) it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness ( $\pi\alpha\sigma\alpha\upsilon\sigma\iota\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\sigma\upsilon\upsilon\mu\eta\upsilon$ )." What Jesus is saying appears to amount to this: John, I do not dispute the truth of your assertion. I am not in need of baptism for Myself; you are right also in your feelings of inferiority. Ordinarily we should be exchanging place. But now, in this present circumstance, your baptism, which God commanded you to bestow on all the people, must be applied to Me. Both of us have a mission to perform; yours, to prepare the way for the Messiah; Mine, to be the Messiah. Therefore you must do your job in baptizing Me, and I must do Mine by being baptized. "Permit now, for in this way it is the right, the fitting thing ( $\pi\acute{\rho}\beta\lambda\epsilon\omicron\nu$ ) for us to fulfill all righteousness. 11

The phrase, "To fulfill all righteousness," has given rise to many suggestions, and we shall review the more important explanations as we proceed. But we first wish to note that even the term "righteousness" has received different interpretations. Bruce suggests that Jesus and John understood the word in different ways. He writes:

The Baptist had a passion for righteousness, yet his conception of righteousness was narrow, severe, legal. Their ideas of righteousness separated the two men by a wide gulf which is covered over by this general, almost evasive, phrase: All righteousness or every form of it. The special form meant is not mere compliance with the ordinance of baptism as administered by an accredited servant of God, but something far deeper, which the new era will unfold. John did not understand that love is the fulfilling of the law.<sup>12</sup>

Although Lenski agrees that the baptism of Jesus was more than submission

<sup>10</sup>Voorhis, op. cit., pp. 40-1.

<sup>11</sup>H. J. A. Bouman, "The Baptism of Christ With Special Reference to the Gift of the Spirit," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVIII, 4-5.

<sup>12</sup>A. B. Bruce, The Synoptic Gospels in The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), p. 86.

to God's will as an act of obedience, he sees in John's baptism "not law, but gospel, not a demand to obey but a gift of grace to be received and accepted as such."<sup>13</sup> Lenski then expounds the meaning of the baptism of Jesus in this way:

Jesus is choosing baptism by John as the right way by which to enter upon his great office, and he is doing this with a fine sense of propriety including John as well as himself. He, the Sinless One, the very Son of God, chooses to put himself alongside of all of the sinful ones for whom John's sacrament was ordained. He thus connects himself with all instances of John's baptism; for it is his mediation that makes these truly efficacious for sinners. By thus joining himself to all these instances of John's baptism, he signifies that he is now ready to take upon himself the load of all these sinners, i.e., to assume his redemptive office.<sup>14</sup>

Adolf Schlatter has a different view. He describes the baptism of Jesus as an act that made His righteousness complete. But this is more than obedience. He states his view this way:

Das Verhalten Jesu wird als Gehorsam beschrieben . . . *Παλιὰν δίκαιοσύνην* denkt nicht an den Gegensatz zwischen Sünde und Gerechtigkeit, sondern unterscheidet Gerechtigkeit von Gerechtigkeit, eine stückweise und eine ganze, eine anfangende und eine fertige. Was der Täufer und Jesus bisher getan hatten, indem jener das Volk taufte und dieser in Nazaret auf den Tag Gottes wartete, war Gerechtigkeit. Nun aber ergeht ein neuer Anspruch Gottes an beide, und indem sie ihm gehorchen, machen sie ihre Gerechtigkeit ganz.<sup>15</sup>

He then explains that the concept "fulfill" means to act out or do entirely what is required:

*πληρῶσαι δικαιοσύνην* hat dieselbe Verwandtschaft und Verschiedenheit von pflastinischen Sprachgebrauch wie *πληρῶν τὸ ἄνεῖν*, womit die Zitate eingeleitet sind. *Π.Π* "aufstehen machen, zum Stehen bringen", sagten die Pflastiner, siehe 5,17; "voll machen" sagte Mat. Wie wird die Gerechtigkeit voll? Durch das Handeln, dadurch,

<sup>13</sup>Lenski, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>A. Schlatter, Der Evangelist Matthäus (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1929), p. 89.

dass das ganz getan wird, was mit absoluter Dringlichkeit als verpflichtende Forderung an den Menschen herantritt.<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, it seems Schlatter believes that the baptism of Jesus was an act of love on His part, and therefore he says:

Was er tat, war im vollen Sinn Liebe. Er gesellt sich zu den Sündern und tritt in die Reihe der Verschuldeten, nicht für sich selbst die Rettung zu finden, nicht wegen eigener Verschuldung auf der Flucht vor dem kommenden Zorn, sondern weil er eins mit der Gemeinde und der Träger der göttlichen Gnade ist und er der göttlichen Barmherzigkeit dient. Aber in diese freieste Erweisung eigener Güte mengt sich kein selbstisches Empfinden ein, das ihn die Gebundenheit an Gottes Willen vergessen liesse. Vielmehr ist gerade die Übung der freien Liebe von dem Bewusstsein begleitet, dass sie das schlechthin sein sollende, von Gott gebotene, mit Gottes Willen übereinstimmende Verhalten sei. Sie ist somit allerhöchste, vollendete, "ganze" Gerechtigkeit.<sup>17</sup>

Schlatter also indicates that in the theological thought of the Jews, the concept of love and the concept of righteousness were separated, but that in the case of Jesus both became one, and so he asserts:

Nun wurden für Jesus beide Normen und beide Pflichten eins. Dies hat aber für das ganze Verhalten durchgreifende Wichtigkeit. Bleiben die Rechts- und die Liebespflicht voneinander getrennt, so wird das Recht hart und die Liebe hoffärtig. Aus ihrer freien Gabe wird so ein Machterweis, der ihren Empfänger erniedrigt. Von dieser selbstgefälligen Liebesübung schied sich Jesus. Es ist ganz erkannte und ganz getane Gerechtigkeit, dass er seinen Ort bei den Schuldigen hat und bei denen steht, denen Gottes Vergebung den Eingang in sein Reich gewährt. Damit gab Jesus seinem Selbstbewusstsein und ebenso seinem Gottestewusstsein die Einheit.<sup>18</sup>

He further explains how the duality of thought in Jewish theology (concerning God's righteousness and His love) could cause uncertainty among men, but that in the baptism of Jesus, God's grace was the dominating factor, and in this sense, and for this reason, Jesus' baptism was the

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 89-90.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

fulfillment of all righteousness. He expresses it this way:

Nach zwei Massen, sagte sie, ordne Gott sein Verhältnis zu den Menschen; ordnet er es nach dem Mass des Rechts, so wird ihnen vergolten; verwendet er das Mass der Güte, so wird ihnen geholfen und gegeben . . . . Durch diese Theologie wird das Verhältnis zu Gott ungewiss, da der Mensch nie wissen kann, nach welchem Mass Gott mit ihm verfährt. Jesus war von diesem Gottesgedanken frei. Der Wille Gottes, der ihn zur Taufe führte, war höchste Gnade und eben darum die ganze Gerechtigkeit.<sup>19</sup>

According to Schlatter's view we might say that while the baptism of Jesus was an act of obedience to fulfill God's demands, it was also a demonstration of the grace of God, so that through His baptism Jesus could bring the righteousness of God to sinful mankind.

Another interpretation of the baptism of Jesus is offered by Oscar Cullmann. He asserts that in His baptism, Jesus "receives the commission to undertake the roll of the suffering Servant of God, who takes on himself the sins of his people," and so He is baptized, not for His own sins, "but for those of the people."<sup>20</sup> This thought opens the door for Cullmann's main conclusion: "Jesus is baptized in view of his death, which effects forgiveness of sins for all men."<sup>21</sup> Cullmann then speaks of the baptism of Jesus as an act which unites Him in solidarity with His whole people, and he declares that this gives a "precise meaning" to the words "fulfill all righteousness." He writes:

The Baptism of Jesus is related to *δικαιοσύνη*, not only his own, but also that of the whole people. The word *πάντων* is probably to be underlined here. Jesus' reply, which exegetes have always found difficult to explain, acquires a concrete meaning: Jesus will effect

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 90-1.

<sup>20</sup>Oscar Cullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 18.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

a general forgiveness.<sup>22</sup>

Thus he fulfills all righteousness, according to Cullmann, because He is "the One called to the office of the Servant of God who suffers for all others."<sup>23</sup>

### The Baptism of Jesus and His Messiahship

Any exegetical study which seeks to interpret the meaning of the Baptism of Jesus must consider the significance of the descent of the Spirit as a dove, and the declaration of the voice from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). Because this declaration recalls certain Messianic prophecies (Ps. 2:7, Is. 42:1), and because of numerous other Old Testament passages which speak of the Lord as putting His Spirit upon someone, many exegetes readily agree that at the Baptism of Jesus, the descent of the Spirit and the heavenly voice are definitely related to His Messiahship. Bouman lists several such Old Testament passages which are regarded as Messianic, shows how the New Testament confirms their Messianic character, and then comments:

An intimate, inseparable connection is established between the Holy Spirit and the Messianic activity of Jesus. The coming of the Holy Spirit is repeatedly pictured as an anointing. From this derives the Hebrew  $\text{מָשִׁיחַ}$  of which  $\text{Χριστός}$  is simply the Greek translation. That is to say, Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, precisely because of the unction of the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup>

But while many agree that this Messianic significance is evident in the

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>24</sup>Bouman, op. cit., p. 9.



Baptism of Jesus, there are those who assert that prior to this, Jesus Himself had little, if any Messianic consciousness.

The view that the Baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of His awareness that He is the Messiah is proposed by Robert MacIntosh in his article "The Dawn of the Messianic Consciousness," where he states that the Baptism of Jesus shows "the first full and clear emergence of Messianic consciousness."<sup>25</sup> According to MacIntosh, this involves the: 1) consciousness of Sonship; 2) revelation of the Divine complacency; and 3) communication of the Spirit.<sup>26</sup> He advances the idea that this new consciousness compelled Jesus to let others know who He was, and so he writes:

The narrative tells us that Jesus did more than discover what He was; He discovered what He was called to be; the Spirit descended upon Him. The Christ, conscious of His Messiahship, cannot possibly any longer await a signal from without. He is Christ; it is for Him, under God, to give signal to others.<sup>27</sup>

Although they seem willing to concede that Jesus may have had some awareness of His unique nature and mission before this, Ernest Burton and Shailer Mathews support the view that the baptism marked the real beginning of Messianic consciousness for Jesus. They say:

The language from heaven is the assurance to Jesus that he is in a peculiar sense the object of God's love and approval, and begets, we can hardly doubt, in a measure in which it had not existed before, the consciousness of his mission as the Messiah.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Robert MacIntosh, "The Dawn of the Messianic Consciousness," The Expository Times, XVI (January--March, 1905), 158.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>28</sup>Ernest Burton and Shailer Mathews, Constructive Studies in the Life of Christ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1901), 55-7.

They expand this view with the statements:

From this act, we must believe, dates the beginning of his clear conviction that he was to undertake the work of founding the kingdom of God; that he was the one whom John was foretelling. From the moment the voice from heaven sounded in his heart he devoted himself with unswerving purpose and self-sacrifice to the new work. Before his baptism he was a private individual; after his baptism he took up the work of the Messiah.<sup>29</sup>

In an effort to defend this point of view, the Interpreter's Bible maintains that

It is not irreverent to assume a slow clarifying of Christ's mind, a deepening awareness during his years at Nazareth that God had for him a destined and destiny-making task. That psychological movement is no false or sacrilegious assumption: it is rather the reverent acknowledgment of Christ's accepted humanness . . . . Thus his experience at baptism is in one sense the issue of his brooding . . . . But the voice at the baptism was also and creatively a divine invasion, as the very words imply.<sup>30</sup>

Other authorities believe that the bestowal of the Spirit at His Baptism does not imply that prior to this, Jesus had been completely empty of God's Spirit. But they assert that with this gift of the Spirit, He now understood His calling more clearly. Thus Plummer asserts that

we are not to understand that He who was conceived by the Spirit was devoid of the Spirit until the Baptism; nor that the gift of the Spirit then made any change in His nature . . . . But the new gift of the Spirit may have illuminated even Him,<sup>31</sup> and made Him more fully aware of His relations to God and to man.

In like manner, Rawlinson comments:

The significance of our Lord's Baptism as an event of His human life is far, of course, from being exhausted by the statement that from henceforth He was certain of His vocation to be Messiah. That which then came to Him meant also that He was now equipped with power and

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> Johnson and Buttrick, op. cit., p. 266.

<sup>31</sup> Plummer, op. cit., p. 35.

with authority for such a work: He is henceforth the Anointed of the Spirit.<sup>52</sup>

But others insist that the bestowal of the Spirit was not a new revelation to Jesus, nor a gift to equip Him with something which He had not previously possessed, but simply the public declaration that He would now begin His Messianic work. Thus M. W. Jacobus writes:

Jedenfalls bedeutet diese Verleihung des Geistes an Jesus nicht, dass bis zu dieser Zeit Jesus nicht in einer besonderen Weise im Besitz des göttlichen Geistes war. Sie bedeutet nur, dass das, was ihm jetzt verliehen wurde, der besondere Besitz des göttlichen Geistes war, veranlasst durch das messianische Werk, zu dem er von Gott berufen war und dem er sein Leben geweiht hatte (Luk. 4:18f und Jes. 11:2; 61:1-3). Mit anderen Worten; er kam nicht zu seinem messianischen Bewusstsein erst im Augenblick des Vollzugs seiner Taufe. Dass dieses messianische Werk das Werk war, zu dem sein Vater ihn berufen hatte, und das ihn zu seiner Taufe führte als zu der öffentlichen Verkündigen seiner heiligen Antwort auf diesen Ruf, das bezeugte ihm sein Bewusstsein; und einzig durch den Besitz dieses göttlichen Geistes konnte er zu einem solchen Bewusstsein kommen und zu einer solcher Verkündigung desselben geführt werden, als er sich seinem Werke weihte.<sup>53</sup>

Schneider discusses the significance of the anointing with the Spirit in a similar way, as we see from this comment:

Erst die Geistverleihung macht ihn fähig, den Dienst zu tun, zu dem er gesandt ist. Es beginnt eine Geschichte in dieser Stunde, in dieser Person, die Geschichte einer neuen Welt. Gott, der seine souveräne Macht in der Schöpfung kundgemacht hat, wird sie nun offenbaren in der Erlösung.<sup>54</sup>

He continues by suggesting that at His Baptism, Jesus is consecrated to His work as the Messiah, and given the Spirit so that He may have the authority to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. He puts it this way:

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<sup>52</sup>Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>53</sup>M. W. Jacobus, "Zur Taufe Jesu Bei Mt. 3:14,15," Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift XL (1929), 52-3.

<sup>54</sup>Schneider, op. cit., p. 25.

Die Taufe ist die Messiasweihe und die Messiasproklamation Jesu. Dafür sind zwei Dinge konstitutiv: Das Herabkommen des Geistes auf Jesus und die Gottesstimme, die ihn feierlich zum Sohne Gottes, d.h. zum messianischen König erklärt. Als Geiststräger wird Jesus mit göttlicher *ἐξουσία* ausgerüstet . . . . Durch den Geist wird Jesus instandgesetzt, die Herrschaft Gottes auf Erden aufzurichten. Die Kraft des Geistes ermächtigt ihn zu den Wundertaten, zum Sieg über den Satan und alle gottfeindlichen Mächte auf Erden. So ist der Geist die machtvolle Ausrüstung, die Jesus für seinen messianischen Beruf braucht.<sup>35</sup>

The conservative view that the baptism of Jesus was not the beginning of His messianic awareness also receives good support from Voorhis, who describes the baptism of the Lord as "the symbolic act whereby Jesus, humanly speaking, indicated His acceptance of the vicarious principle, and dedicated Himself to that vicarious ministry and death which He regarded as the Father's will for Him and as the way of salvation for sinning man."<sup>36</sup> Proceeding on that basis, Voorhis then contends:

Our interpretation undercuts all theories which see in the ministry of Jesus a progressive consciousness of divinity, Messiahship, and mission. Jesus moved through the events of His ministry, not with a confused mind that slowly crystallized in despair upon the fact of His approaching death, but with clear-cut purpose to do the Father's will in seeking and saving the lost. To be sure, there was a progressive unfolding of the truth to the multitudes concerning Himself and His mission, concerning God and the Kingdom; a progression determined by the capacity of His hearers to understand. But the progressive unfolding of teaching does not argue that the teacher knows not beyond the point of his exposition. Indeed, with any effective teacher quite the reverse is true. The baptism of Jesus thus may offer some striking challenges to liberal views; and it may have a greater part than has been realized in demonstrating the coherent, organic unity of the conservative concept of Christ and the Gospels.

Thus we may also refer again to the work of Bouman, who notes the

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Voorhis, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

need to eliminate false notions that have been developed over the baptism of Christ. He lists various erroneous views in this summary:

It has been said that here was the beginning of Christ's Messianic consciousness; that the gift of the Spirit was the moment when the Logos took possession of the man Jesus and stayed with Him until His death on the cross; that the unipersonal God endowed the mere man Jesus with certain temporary powers, according to the teaching of dynamic Monarchianism; that, in short, by the descent of the Spirit something was given to Christ that He did not have before.<sup>38</sup>

But in answer to such errors, Bouman cites Schlatter's view that the coming of the Spirit did not make Christ the Son of God, but was rather the divine signal, for which Jesus had waited, to begin His work. Therefore, as Bouman observes, the descent of the Spirit was important not only for Jesus, but "the witness of the Spirit's descent on Christ was decisive for John. Henceforth he could and did point to Jesus and say: 'Behold the Lamb of God.'<sup>39</sup> For Jesus Himself, Bouman believes that "the descent of the Spirit . . . signified the public declaration from the Father that now His Messianic work in His threefold office was to begin."<sup>40</sup> Continuing the development of that thought, Bouman shows that now the long years of waiting to begin the public office were over for Christ:

The Son, who made Himself the Servant of Jehovah and would take no step without the Father's sanction, now received that sanction by means of the Spirit's unction and the voice from heaven so closely connected with it. The events immediately following Christ's baptism and the descent of the Spirit show that the discharge of His

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<sup>38</sup>Bouman, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

Messianic office is the result of the Spirit's anointing.<sup>41</sup>

Thus while we may firmly maintain that the coming of the Holy Ghost upon Jesus did not add to His divine nature, nor change Him into a different Person from what He had been, we should realize, as Bouman says, that it did make clear that

according to His human nature and in His role as the Servant of Jehovah, He lived [ ] and acted in total submission to the Father's will and performed His Messianic functions under the Father's direction. The descent of the Spirit was the Father's way of signaling for the Son the fact that now the time had come to enter on His public redemptive work and that the unction with the Spirit without measure<sup>42</sup> endowed Him, according to His servant status, with the full resources of the divine power.

Because any action of Christ's, or any act performed in relation to Him, must be linked with the purpose of the incarnation, that He came to be our Savior, the descent of the Holy Spirit on Christ also has great significance for us, and so Bouman adds:

The soteriological aspects are paramount. By the anointing with the Spirit from above, Jesus began in very truth to be the Christ, as Luther points out: "This is the beginning of the New Testament. Although Christ was born as a child, He did not yet begin His office. Nor did He presume to do so until He was called thereto by the Father. In sum, with the Baptism the office begins; here He becomes our Christ, our Savior; for this purpose He had come, as Isaiah says, chapter 61, which Christ applies to Himself."<sup>43</sup>

Thus the Descent of the Spirit upon Jesus immediately after His Baptism is essential for our understanding of Jesus as the Messiah, and for the Savior Himself it was vital for the successful completion of His work, as Bouman indicates in the statement:

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

Without the Spirit's anointing, Jesus would not be the Christ, our Christ, who repelled Satan's onslaughts, fulfilled all righteousness, performed His prophetic ministry in His revelation of God to us, His high priestly function in the perfect sacrifice for sin and ceaseless intercession for sinners, and rules over all as king and head of the church until its final consummation in glory.<sup>44</sup>

Before bringing to a close this chapter of exegetical comment on the Baptism of Jesus, we wish to call attention to one other view, which merits attention because of its unique emphasis on the possible implications of the verb ἀναβαίνειν. We refer to the suggestion of G. W. H. Lampe, who says that the Baptism of Jesus with the Spirit was in a sense "proleptic", a baptism which anticipated and guaranteed the future promise of the Spirit which He would receive and then in turn bestow upon His followers after He had ascended into heaven. Discussing the possible symbolism of Christ's Baptism as recorded by Mark and Matthew, Lampe writes:

The description of Christ ascending from the water, which represents His death, may possibly point forward to the Ascension, when the Spirit bestowed by anticipation upon the Servant-Messiah at the Jordan was received by Him from the Father so as to be poured out on all those who should henceforth be baptized in His name.<sup>45</sup>

As evidence for this proposal, Lampe refers to the New Testament usage of ἀναβαίνειν, which is used seven times to refer to Christ's ascension, and he furthermore declares that he believes the Ascension of Christ was an integral part of the apostolic preaching, being implied also in Philip-  
pians 2:9. His reasoning is summarized in this comment:

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>45</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, The Seal of the Spirit (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1951), p. 43.

The Marcan and Matthean accounts of the Baptism may symbolize the fact that the risen and ascended Lord was the giver of the Spirit. Such may be the significance of the emphasis laid upon the ascension from the water (*εὐθείως, ἀναβαίνειν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος*). ἀναβαίνειν, which is most frequently used of going up to the Temple sanctuary or the holy city, is employed seven times in the New Testament of the Ascension of Christ. If this is the meaning intended by Mark and Matthew, Luke omits to reproduce it, no doubt because he has reserved for Acts a full account of the Ascension itself.<sup>46</sup>

But it seems to us that the general usage of the word ἀναβαίνειν made the term appropriate for describing the action by which Jesus went up out of the water, and that Lampe's inference drawn from ἀναβαίνειν can hardly be sustained.

The suggestion has been made that in His Baptism, Jesus stands as the true Israel, who came to "fulfill all righteousness." This suggestion sees an analogy between Israel's coming up out of the Red Sea and Jesus' coming up from the Jordan at His Baptism. We shall give this suggestion more detailed attention in the following chapter.

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<sup>46</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, "Baptism in the New Testament" Scottish Journal of Theology, V (June, 1952), 168.



## CHAPTER V

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BAPTISM FOR JESUS

#### The Baptism of Jesus and His Sonship

The last section of the preceding chapter demonstrated the importance of the Baptism of Jesus, and in particular the descent of the Spirit at His Baptism, for the beginning and the fulfillment of the Messiahship of Jesus. But along with the descent of the Spirit in a dove-like form came the Voice from heaven saying: "Thou art my beloved Son; with Thee I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). These words not only emphasize the divine Sonship of Jesus, but, as we shall observe later, have led some to conclude that the Baptism was more a sign of His Sonship than of His Messiahship. For Jesus Himself, these words must have held special significance. But we need not, and should not, conclude as Dibelius does, that

The original sense of this event is doubtless that Jesus at this moment was instituted Son of God, and that this was made plain by the descent of the Spirit upon Him. . . . the Spirit descends, and Jesus receives Him as a lasting property, and thus the greatness now proclaimed was not formerly proper to Him, rather He receives it only at this moment. The story tells, therefore, of Christ's adoption as the Son of God.<sup>1</sup>

To refute this liberal, unscriptural view, we repeat what Bouman affirms when he says: "These words of the Father concerning Jesus do not mean, of course, that right here Jesus became the Son of God. He was that and

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, translated by Bertram Lee Wolf, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), pp. 271-72.

is that from all eternity."<sup>2</sup>

The special significance of the words spoken by the Voice out of heaven cannot be limited to the thought that in a general way the Father designates the Son as the object of His love and approval. Rather, as Bouman observes,

The Father's declaration is given specific significance by the context. By His words the father is, in effect, saying: I am in complete harmony with, and I express publicly my full approval of, what has just transpired and of what this implies.<sup>3</sup>

We ought to note also, that whereas we chose to follow Arndt in translating in the present tense<sup>4</sup> the words spoken by the Father, Bouman renders the saying in the past tense: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I took delight."<sup>5</sup> To this he adds a footnote on the meaning of *εὐδόκησα*, saying:

This aorist would seem to imply more than present approval. The first part of the Father's statement is obviously related to the solemn decree recorded in Psalm 2: 'Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee'. . . . The strong terms of approval, *εὐδόκησα* and *ἀγαπᾷς* echo the declaration in Is. 42:1, where the corresponding terms are 'Mine Elect' and 'My soul delighteth.' The parallel suggests that *εὐδόκησα* is a pregnant term, implying deliberate choice in the past (cf. I Peter 1:20, 'who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world but was manifest in these last times for you'). The effects and results of this eternal choice carry over into all the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament and are brought to incipient fruition at the Baptism . . . . The fact that in Is. 42:1 the Father's choice and approval, the Son's servant status, as well as the bestowal of the Spirit, are all united in one great Messianic prophecy demonstrates the interrelation and interdependence of all details of our Lord's Baptism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Herbert J. A. Bouman, "The Baptism of Christ with Special Reference to the Gift of the Spirit", Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVIII, 13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Supra, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>Bouman, loc. cit., p. 18

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

But whether we interpret εὐδοκῆσαι as present or past tense, Jesus could now be certain, both in His divine nature and in His human nature, that He had the full sanction of the heavenly Father, so that later on, when talking with the Jews and comparing His work and His mission with that of John the Baptist, Jesus could say in John 5:36-37:

But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father hath granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me, And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me.

Thus the Baptism of Jesus was of vast significance to Him for His own sense of divine Sonship.

At the same time, Johannes Schneider believes that this sense of Sonship was linked with the Messianic Kingship of Jesus. He asserts that at the Baptism, Jesus was also consecrated to be the Messianic King, and he explains the significance of the heavenly Voice in this way:

Die Gottesstimme bei der Taufe Jesu dient dazu, das Ereignis, das hier geschieht, zu erklären. Sie gibt die Sinndeutung der Taufe Jesu unter der Geistverleihung an Jesus. Die göttliche Manifestation wird im Worte des Alten Testaments gekleidet: Ps. 2:7 und Jes. 42:1 . . . . Jesus wird durch dieses Gotteswort zum messianischen König geweiht. Er wird der wahre König Israhels sein und die königlichen Rechte in einer Weise ausüben, wie das bisher noch nicht der Fall gewesen ist. Er wird in einzigartiger Weise der geliebte und erwählte Sohn Gottes sein.<sup>7</sup>

However, this seems very dubious. Jesus had no pretensions of becoming an earthly king (John 6:15; 18:36) and therefore the concept of Messianic Kingship was for Him not one of earthly and temporal glory. It rather denoted for Him the humble suffering of the Servant of God. The Interim

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<sup>7</sup> Johannes Schneider, Die Taufe im Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1952), p. 26.

Report of the Special Commission on Baptism fittingly says:

At His Baptism Jesus was sealed by God the Father as His Son and as the Suffering Servant (John 6:27). He was sealed by being anointed with the Holy Spirit to preach and fulfil the Word of God (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; Hebrews 1:9). In fulfilment of His mission as the Son of God and in fulfilment of the Word of God, He was the Truth, for He kept faith or truth with the Father, and was obedient even unto death as the Servant sent by God.<sup>8</sup>

The life and witness of Jesus bear out that service was more predominant in the mind of Jesus than that of being a king. So we find that Rawlinson, in discussing Jesus' own interpretation of His mission as the Messias designatus, observes that even though Jesus did not allude explicitly to the 'Servant' passages in the sayings recorded of Him, He did reveal His concept of the Messiah as the servant or slave of Yahweh by the two ideas of suffering and service in His teaching as a whole, and he concludes:

Suffering, it is implied, is to be the vocation of every true servant of the Lord, every son of the coming Kingdom; suffering, in particular, is to be the destiny of the Son of Man; and the idea of service transvalues that of royalty.<sup>9</sup>

Along similar lines H. Wheeler Robinson, referring to the heavenly Voice heard at the Baptism of Jesus, comments:

So far as the saying faithfully reflects the consciousness of Jesus, it warrants us in the belief that His baptism marks "the hour in which a new conception of the Messiah was born" (Feine, Theologie des Neuen Testaments, p. 66) . . . our impression that the reference to the Servant is primary is confirmed by the sequel to the baptism, viz., the Temptation. Just as this involved the newly found Messianic consciousness--"if thou art the Son of God,"-- so it involved a new conception of the meaning of that Messiahship, in harmony with

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<sup>8</sup>The Church of Scotland, Special Commission on Baptism, Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism (Edinburgh: Blackwell, 1966), p.48.

<sup>9</sup>Alfred Edward Rawlinson, The Gospel According to St. Mark, The Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1925), p. 255.

the moral and religious character of the Servant, not with a political kingship.<sup>10</sup>

Although we cannot agree with Robinson that the Baptism involved a "newly found Messianic consciousness" for Jesus, we do believe that merging the concept of the Messiah with that of the Suffering Servant as Jesus did was something new in Jewish thought. Gullmann observes:

The suffering Servant of God is, like the Messiah, already known to Judaism. But that the Messiah should be at the same time the suffering Servant of God is an impossible conception for Judaism. It is true that the Messiah occasionally bears the title of Servant of God; but the representative suffering that is characteristic of the Ebed Jahwe is never ascribed to him. The Targum at Isa. 53 is most instructive at this point. Connection between the two is first made through the life of Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

And because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was the humble, suffering Servant of God, He now is exalted at the right hand of God as Lord of all.

For Jesus, His Baptism was also significant for His Sonship in this regard, that He knew He would do His work under the power and authority of the Spirit. On this aspect of the Baptism, Rawlinson comments:

as He came up out of those waters there burst upon Him, with renewed certainty, the conviction that He was indeed the Son of God . . . together with the consciousness of supreme endowment with the plenitude of spiritual authority and power.<sup>12</sup>

This factor of a special endowment with authority through the gift of the Spirit is also noted by Lampe:

The descent of the Spirit was directly connected with the heavenly proclamation of the Lord's divine Sonship; indeed, His possession

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<sup>10</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, The Cross in the Old Testament (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 100.

<sup>11</sup>Oscar Gullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid, (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 19.

<sup>12</sup>Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 254.

of the Spirit, which fulfilled the traditional expectation of the Messiah, has as its immediate consequences the declaration and realization of His status as the Son of God . . . this "resting" of the Spirit is of a different quality from the temporary and partial Spirit possession of a prophet. It is a continuous and enduring endowment of Jesus with the "authority" and "power" (greater than that of scribes and prophets) which are manifested in his teaching and mighty works, the Messianic *οἰκνῆτα* of John 4:10.<sup>13</sup>

We have thus far shown that the Baptism of Jesus was important for His position as the Son of God. We have also, particularly in the preceding chapter, related the Baptism of Jesus to His mission as the Messiah. But it is interesting to note that there are those who claim that the concept of Sonship is far more important than that of Messiahship; not only that, they prefer to find no evidence for His Messiahship in His Baptism. H. Wheeler Robinson, for example, analyzes the thoughts of Jesus regarding His work and, quoting Moffatt, observes: "It is generally recognized by New Testament exegetes that 'it is the filial, not the messianic consciousness of Jesus which is the basis of all Christianity' (Moffatt, The Theology of the Gospels, p. 152)."<sup>14</sup> Robinson offers support for this view by noting that practically all the teaching and activity of Jesus can be brought under the category of divine Sonship, including the feeling of sonship which he sought to elicit or create in other hearts. He adds:

Here we may venture to believe, was the content of His own inner life, as well as of His expression of that inner life in word and deed. Sonship is the most adequate and permanent of the New Testament con-

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<sup>13</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, The Seal of the Spirit (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1951), p. 35.

<sup>14</sup>Robinson, op. cit., p. 99.

cepts of the Person of Christ, because the most universal, Jesus took this human analogy to deepen and enrich it by a new moral and religious realization of its possibilities, which remains true to the concept itself. On the other hand, though the Jewish conception of a 'Messiah' is of great importance for primitive Christianity, its significance speedily became historical only. "Jesus is the Christ" was soon replaced by "Jesus is Lord" outside the Jewish Christianity. Not only so, but Jesus Himself so profoundly modified the Messianic conception, so far as He adopted it, that we may easily be misled in speaking of Him as the Messiah at all. For the Davidic or political form of the conception He had little or no use, whilst the transcendental Messiah of Jewish apocalyptic participates in that ethical and religious transformation which apocalyptic in general received at His hands. We have one of the chief guiding principles of that transformation in the conception of the Servant, which Jesus for the first time blended with that of the Messiah. Definite evidence of this connection meets us on the very threshold<sup>15</sup> of the public ministry of Jesus, in the experience of His baptism.

Basic to this line of thought is our understanding of the term "Messiah", for the Jews, we have noted, were not looking for a Messiah who would be at the same time the suffering Servant of God.

On the other hand, George Duncan believes that the Baptism of Jesus has no connection at all with His Messiahship, but is rather a declaration of His Sonship. Furthermore, Duncan seems to believe that Messiahship and Sonship are two completely different terms, and that the thoughts behind them should be kept clearly apart. Duncan introduces his interpretation of these terms by commenting on the witness of John the Baptist recorded in the Fourth Gospel. He asserts that it is erroneous to think that John the Baptist at once began to believe that in Jesus the Messiah had come, and he contends that "nowhere is it said that the Baptist ascribed to Jesus the name 'Messiah'; and what he is represented as saying about Jesus does not imply Messiahship." However, at this point he

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

adds a footnote:

Andrew, however, at this time a disciple of the Baptist, is represented as saying: "We have found the Messiah" (1:41); cf. 4:25f. These are the only instances of the Hebrew form Messiah (as distinct from the Greek form Christ) in the New Testament.<sup>16</sup>

Apparently the fact that "Christ" is the simple Greek translation of the Hebrew term Messiah holds little importance for him, for Duncan asserts that John did not proclaim Jesus to be the Messiah, having never used that name or title in reference to Him, and that in his proclamation, he simply foretold the coming of one ('the mightier one'), who, "equipped with greater power, will exercise a more potent form of baptism. But no name or title is given to this 'mightier one'; what is announced about him is the work he may be expected to do."<sup>17</sup> This leads Duncan to suggest that John had here in mind some figure with a recognized place in the religious hopes of his day, and he concludes that John was thinking of the promised Elijah (Mal. 4:5) when he spoke about the 'coming one'.

Yet even though he maintains that John does not call Jesus the Messiah, Duncan by no means belittles the Baptist's viewpoint of Jesus, for he notes that John speaks of Him as

the Son of God, a term which, when strictly interpreted, has a quite different connotation from the term Messiah. For while Messiahship implies divine appointment, Sonship speaks of spiritual affinity--to be filled with the Spirit and to be a Son of God are one and the same thing (cf. Rom. 8:14). He goes further, and calls Jesus the Lamb of God (1:36)-- in 1:29 he points Him out as "the Lamb of God who is to take away the sin of the world."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>George Duncan, Jesus, Son of Man (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949), p. 89.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 83f.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 91.



Later Duncan explains his view by saying that the Baptist was evidently thinking of Isaiah 53, but he maintains:

It is not a messianic interpretation which the Baptist is represented as giving to it here. He is thinking, not of the Messiah as such, but of God's elect Servant, probably of the Prophet whom God is expected to send, and who, in the performance of his mission and in fulfillment of what had been foretold, was to suffer for the sins of his brethren.<sup>19</sup>

The clear separation that Duncan draws between the terms Son of God and Messiah is evident in the following remark:

It is frequently said that in the religious history of Israel the term Son of God was identical with Messiah. Such an assertion is apt to be misleading; for the two terms had a different connotation and a different history. It is true that in certain religious circles, both Jewish and Christian, they might come to be interpreted as if they had much the same meaning, and they might be applied together to the same person -- e.g., according to the version in Matthew, Simon Peter's confession of faith took the form: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God; and the words of the high priest at the trial of Jesus were: "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Mt. 16:16; 26:63). This ought not, however, to blind us to the fact that the two conceptions were different in origin, and that (despite the influence of Psalm 2 in which God's Messiah is called His Son) Son of God was not in itself a recognized messianic term.<sup>20</sup>

How is this interpretation related to the Baptism of Jesus? Duncan proposes that the experience of Jesus at His Baptism gave Him a conviction that He could be called "the Son of God" in a sense that could be applied to no other person. Duncan suggests that the more men studied the mystery of the holiness and love of God, the more they must have felt unworthy and unable to think of themselves as sons of God. But, says Duncan:

At last, in the fulness of time, God raised up One in whom He could

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

be satisfied. And we read how, as He stood in Jordan ready to be baptized into the fellowship of those who were ready to receive the Lord when He should come, Jesus heard a voice from heaven saying: "Thou art my Son, the beloved; on Thee I have set my approval." For years previous to the Baptism experience He had learned to lift up His eyes to heaven and acknowledge God as "the Father." Now, as the Spirit of God descends on Him at His Baptism, there comes from God the answering voice which says: "I, the Father, acknowledge Thee as my Son." And it is not merely "one son among many." It is "my Son, the beloved"; and "the beloved" in such a context implies an only son.<sup>21</sup>

The uniqueness of the designation "son", according to Duncan, is that

thus at the Baptism Jesus learns not merely that God is pleased to regard Him as a Son, but that in all Israel, the nation to which He had been a Father, and which He had marked out for His inheritance, there was one and one only in whose life the Father could recognize the spirit of Sonship.<sup>22</sup>

From that Duncan then concludes:

The Baptism-experience, therefore, is for Jesus not a revelation of Messiahship but a revelation of Sonship. It is a recognition of spiritual affinity -- not primarily at least, a call to office. Inevitably, of course, the acknowledgment of His Sonship raises for Jesus the question of the implications of Sonship -- the Son must ask what is the Father's will for Him; to that extent a call to office or mission cannot be excluded. But it is noteworthy how careful our sources are at this point to emphasize the so-called "filial consciousness" of Jesus as fundamental.<sup>23</sup>

But Duncan's reluctance to find any Messianic significance in the Baptism of Jesus is perhaps seen best in the manner in which he interprets the reference to Psalm 2:7, for he says:

The words that sounded in the soul of Jesus ("Thou art my Son") were an echo from the Second Psalm. Yet Jesus could apply to Himself the Psalmist's words without being tied to the Psalmist's interpretation. For the idea of Sonship found in Psalm 2 is altogether different from that which we have traced through the messages of the prophets to its fulfillment in the person of Jesus. The Son in that Psalm is not one whose character is a reflex of the Father's; rather He is the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

King-Messiah, the viceregent of Jehovah, who goes forth in the name of God to scatter the heathen hosts who rage against Jehovah and His Anointed. It is not so with Jesus. Ranging Himself in line with the evangelical tradition, Jesus sees clearly at His Baptism, not that He is called to act as God's Messiah, but that He is so linked in spirit with the Father that the Father acknowledges Him to be His Son.<sup>24</sup>

In view of this, Duncan suggests that the Baptism of Jesus had significance for Him regarding His character, rather than His mission, saying:

This emphasis on "character" rather than on "mission" is further brought out in the words which, viz. "in Thee I am well pleased," or better, "on Thee I set my approval"; for these words, echoing as they do one of the Servant passages in Isaiah, imply that even at His Baptism Jesus recognized that Sonship for Him must be interpreted in terms of Service.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, Duncan observes that there were many conceptions of Messiahship with which Jesus would have refused to identify Himself. He writes:

Jesus saw clearly that, in discharging the mission which was opening out before Him, He must at all points be guided by loyalty to His Sonship and to the Father who had called Him to be His Son. His first task therefore was to make real to His brethren the presence of the Father from whom so many things were separating them; and hand in hand with this went the other task of bringing those brethren back into the family of God the Father. Such tasks were not "messianic" as that term was generally understood; and in the Temptations Jesus saw clearly that the traditional conceptions of Messiahship shed no light on the methods by which He was to accomplish them. Other methods, however, were open to Him. He would preach the Gospel, He would teach and train disciples; and He would bring to bear on the needs of daily life the mercy and power of the living God.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems to us that though many Jews held false notions of the true meaning of Messiahship, that does not imply that Jesus Himself was not both the Son of God and the promised Messiah.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 115-16.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

The emphasis which Duncan places upon the Sonship of Jesus provides the opportunity for discussing one other suggestion which had been made concerning the significance of the Baptism of Jesus. We refer to the concept of Jesus as the true Israel. Those who maintain that Jesus is the true Israel find a line of comparison between Israel's going into the Red Sea and coming up again on the other side, and Jesus' stepping down into the Jordan and coming up again after the Baptism. The concept of Jesus as the true Israel also proposes that He is the true Israel, because by His perfect obedience He fulfilled all righteousness, something which Israel as a people had not done. This concept furthermore suggests that there is a connection between the words addressed to Jesus at His Baptism, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Mark 1: 11), and certain Old Testament passages which identify Israel as God's Son, such as Ex. 4:22, Hos. 11:1, and possibly Jer. 31:20.

This is an interesting suggestion, but we have found little to support it. True, we have noted how Duncan believes that men felt unworthy and unable to think of themselves as sons of God; but "At last, in the fullness of time, God raised up One in whom He could be satisfied."<sup>27</sup> But Duncan does not assert that Jesus is, therefore, the true Israel. Nor does Vincent Taylor, who writes that "the sense of Sonship in the thought of Jesus is intimately connected with His knowledge of the Fatherhood of God and was mediated by frequent and deep communion with Him during hours of prayer and meditation."<sup>28</sup> Later, Taylor considers Jesus' usage of the

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<sup>27</sup>Supra, p. 76.

<sup>28</sup>Vincent Taylor, The Person of Christ in New Testament Teaching (London: MacMillan and Company, 1956), p. 174.

term "Father" as a designation for God, and after referring to the work of T. W. Manson and Jeremias, He comments that "the designation of God as Father, although used in the Old Testament to express the certainty of His choice of Israel, is only quite rarely attested."<sup>29</sup> And though Taylor believes that "we may infer that the striking and distinctive use of the name 'My Father' by Jesus, with all the depth of meaning He put into it, is part of the secret of His parallel use of the phrase "the Son,"<sup>30</sup> he does not make any attempt to identify Jesus as the true Israel.

Nor does the concept of Jesus as the true Israel receive any support from Oscar Gullmann, who writes that the title "Sohn Gottes" is applied first to "das ganze Volk Israel," in the second place "trägt der König Israel diesen Titel; zum dritten schliesslich heissen besondere Beauftragte Gottes, wie die Engel und vielleicht auch der Messias, so." On the significance of the term when used in connection with the people of Israel Gullmann writes that it has the double thought "dass Gott sich dieses Volk für eine besondere Mission erwählt hat, und dass dieses sein Volk ihm absoluten Gehorsam schuldet."<sup>31</sup> Referring to the Baptism of Jesus, Gullmann simply comments "die Sohnesbezeichnung (ist) in charakteristischer Weise mit dem Eingangsvers der alttestamentlichen Lieder vom leidenden Gottesknecht verbunden."<sup>32</sup>

We realize, of course, that there may be reliable authorities who do offer evidence to support the concept of Jesus as the true Israel. But

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>31</sup>Oscar Gullman, Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1957), p. 279.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

we are not aware of them, and can find little to support this view.

### The Baptism of Jesus as a Consecration to the Priesthood

According to Luke 3:23, Jesus was "about thirty years of age" at the time of His Baptism. Some interpreters note that there is a specific connection between His Baptism at that age and the ceremonial law of the Old Testament, which prescribed that all who work in the "tent of the meeting" should be "from thirty years old" (Num. 4:3). Those who hold this view seem to agree that Jesus' Baptism is definitely related to His Messianic work, and they maintain that His baptism established a particular connection with His three-fold office as Prophet, Priest, and King. Because of the age factor mentioned in the ceremonial law, as noted above, they believe that the Baptism of Jesus has a special meaning in view of His office as our great High Priest. On the basis of the view that at His Baptism Jesus was consecrated as Messiah and Priest, Benjamin F. Atkinson also maintains that the Baptism was not by immersion, but by sprinkling. He says:

Hence John in fulfilling all righteousness as Jesus required in demanding baptism at his hands needed only to "sprinkle water of purification upon" Him to consecrate Him ceremonially to His life ministry and to present Him to the people as their long expected Messiah-- the sacrificial "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."<sup>33</sup>

Atkinson then proceeds to demonstrate why he believes that Jesus was baptized in compliance with His calling as our great High Priest:

Christ came to be the SUCCESSOR of them all as the one and only "High Priest forever", the ante-type of the Levitical priesthood as typified by the services performed by both the priests and the Levites their helpers, to offer himself, once for all in sacrifice

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<sup>33</sup> Benjamin Franklin Atkinson, Moses, John and Christ, the Famous Baptizers (Louisville, Kentucky: Herald Press, 1938), p. 15.

on the cross to make the atonement and be "the propitiation for the sins of the whole world." Thus He "fulfilled all righteousness" as required by His own law given through Moses.<sup>34</sup>

Although starting from a different point of view, Ernst Gerfen develops a similar explanation for the Baptism of Jesus. He rejects the concept that Jesus submitted to the baptism of John for our sins, and in that way fulfilled all righteousness for us, for he contends that such a view would make the baptism of Jesus the general redemption of mankind, and eliminate the need for our own baptism. In contrast to this, Gerfen maintains that Jesus was baptised to fulfill the Old Covenant law regulating the initiation of a priest, and so he states:

No one could publicly officiate among the Jews as priest and teacher until he arrived at the age of thirty years. Christ, observing this law, did not begin to teach before that time. Again, no one could hold such a public office, unless he was publicly consecrated to the same. And the law, governing such consecration, required a two-fold transaction, viz. baptism with water or religious washing, and the anointing with oil. The former signified the purification of the body, the latter the anointing with the Spirit from on high. Both of which was done at Christ's baptism.<sup>35</sup>

He therefore explains the significance of the Baptism of Jesus in these words: "Thus Christ by fulfilling all righteousness, or obeying the law of the Old Covenant, simply showed His high claim to His threefold office. That is the reason why He was baptised." But when he adds the thought "John evidently knew that Christ asked Baptism of him for an extraordinary purpose, hence he at first hesitated,"<sup>36</sup> his comment does seem to be

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>35</sup>Ernst Gerfen, Baptisein (Columbus: F. J. Haer Printing Company, 1908), pp. 149-50.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

pure conjecture and it loses some of its force. In addition, Voorhis observes that Jesus did not say to John that he must be baptized, as though it were a matter of ceremonial necessity, but rather 'permit it,' and he adds that viewing the Baptism of Jesus as a ceremonial cleansing would not bring it into vital relation with the rest of the New Testament, and it would be a more or less isolated episode.<sup>35</sup> It may be that there is some connection between the Baptism of Jesus and His office as our High Priest, but one would wish for more New Testament evidence than that supplied by the writers quoted above.

#### The Baptism of Jesus as the Beginning of His Ministry

Although it may appear to be repetitious of what has already been said about the significance of the Baptism of Jesus for His Messiahship and Sonship, there is good reason for emphasizing the point that the Baptism of Jesus may be called the beginning of His public ministry. For that reason it had specific meaning for Him. Some, of course, claim that after the baptism, Jesus had a new understanding of His Messianic mission which He had never had before. Thus we have the comment of Arthur Headlam:

The narratives of the Gospels make it quite clear that His baptism was for Jesus a great spiritual crisis, that in such a way as never before He was conscious of His divine power and mission, that He felt, as not previously, that He was the Son of God, the servant summoned for God's work. The Baptism means the temptation, and the beginning of His ministry.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> John W. Voorhis, "The Baptism of Jesus and His Sinlessness," The Evangelical Quarterly, VII, 51-2.

<sup>38</sup> Arthur C. Headlam, The Life and Teachings of Jesus the Christ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925), p. 151.



A similar interpretation of the Baptism of Jesus is presented by Markus Barth in the following:

Jesus Christ's baptism is not His entering into a sacred little circle of holy people; it is (a) an amazing step out of security and hiddenness, into the midst of the crowds that have to confess nothing else but sin, (b) a shameful, public, binding act by which He declares His solidarity with these sinners, (c) the conscious acceptance of and entering into the ministry of the Servant who lays down His life for the many.<sup>39</sup>

While both men just quoted speak of the Baptism of Jesus as the beginning of His ministry, we reject their emphasis on its being a new consciousness which was unknown to Him prior to that event.

Yet the Baptism of Jesus can rightly be called the beginning of His work as the Christ, as I John 5:6 perhaps suggests. Robert Law, in his interpretation of the First Epistle of John, comments on the term "water and blood" used in I John 5:6:

The clue to this is the Docetic tenet that the aeon Christ descended upon Jesus at His Baptism, and departed again from Him before His Passion. Thus it is evident that the "water" here denotes our Lord's Baptism, the "blood" His death on Calvary. The Cerinthian heresy taught that the Christ came by "water," but denied that He came by "blood" also. Hence St. John's repeated emphatic assertion that He came "not by water only, but by water and the blood".<sup>38</sup>

Law also asserts that the terms "He that cometh" and "He that came" are technical expressions used by St. John in the Gospel and also in the Synoptics as a specific designation of the Messiah, and so he adds:

When, therefore, it is said that Jesus the Son of God "came" by water and by blood, it is signified that first by His Baptism and then by His death, Jesus entered actually and effectively upon His Messianic

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<sup>39</sup>Markus Barth, "Baptism and Evangelism," The Scottish Journal of Theology III (March, 1959), 35.

<sup>40</sup>Robert Law, The Tests of Life (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1914), p.96.

ministry.<sup>41</sup>

Continuing in his interpretation of I John 5:6, Law declares that the phrase "by water" (*δι' ὕδατος*) is explained in the Gospels "where the Baptism is invariably regarded as the actual beginning of His Messianic ministry (John 1:31, Acts 1:22; Mark's Gospel begins with the Baptism)." In a footnote on the interpretation of *δι' ὕδατος* he writes: "The exact significance of *δι'* with *ὑδατος* and *λίματος* is not easy to determine. The idea may be that of the door, so to say, through which Christ entered upon His mission."<sup>42</sup> Johannes Schneider supports this interpretation of I John 5:6. He writes: "Johannes hat hier nicht nur das Kreuz Christi im Sinne, sondern auch die Taufe."<sup>43</sup> We realize, of course, that I John 5:6 is an exceedingly difficult passage which has received other interpretations.

Nevertheless, we believe that the Baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of His ministry because it was the transition from private life to His public activity, as Voorhis indicates in the comment:

The importance of the baptism of Jesus is suggested in part by its position in the Gospel records. It marks the first appearance and the first words of Jesus in His maturity; and His transition from private life to public ministry.<sup>44</sup>

Plummer also gives expression to this thought, but develops it more fully:

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Schneider, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>44</sup>Voorhis, op. cit., p. 39.

At the end of His ministry, He was to be baptized in suffering (Lk. 12:50; Mk. 10:38), and to bear the sins of others, as a sinless Victim, on the tree (I Pet. 2:24). Must He not, at the beginning of His ministry, express His sympathy with those who were burdened by sin, although He had none of His own, by submitting to be baptized by John? He, like others, could bury His past beneath the waters of Jordan, and rise again to a life in accordance with God's will. The change with them was from a life of sin, displeasing to God, to a life of righteousness, acceptable to Him. The change with Him was from the home-life of intellectual and spiritual development (Lk. 2:52) to the life of public ministry as the Messiah; but both were equally pleasing to God. The thirty years of peaceful preparation are buried; and the Messiah comes out of Jordan for the storm and stress of the work that His Father has given Him to do.<sup>45</sup>

In concluding this chapter, we wish to offer just two more statements, both of which demonstrate how the Baptism of Jesus may properly be regarded as the beginning of His ministry. The first comes from T. W. Manson:

Jesus came to baptism under a strong sense of vocation. This was more than confirmed by the experience which immediately followed the baptism. Jesus knew beyond a peradventure that he was chosen by God for a task greater even than John's. John's baptism, which was the climax of John's prophetic activity, was but the starting point for the Ministry of Jesus.<sup>46</sup>

The other declaration comes from Martin Luther, who describes the Baptism of Jesus as "das vornehmste Stück der Schrift," and adds:

Und da geht auch das Neue Testament an und nicht an der Kindheit Christ; darum auch Markus und Johannes wenig gedenken seiner Kindheit. Petrus und Paulus schreiben gar nichts davon; nicht dass sie verachten, was Matthäus und Lukas davon schreiben, sondern sie eilen zu dem vollkommenen Stück, darin das Amt angeht. Denn wiewohl er ein Kind geboren war, war doch noch das Amt nicht angefangen, hat sich auch des nicht unterwunden, bis er vom Vater dasu berufen ward. Und summa summarum, in der Taufe geht das Amt an, da wird er unser Christus, unser Heiland (Mueller's emphasis).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), p. 30.

<sup>46</sup>T. W. Manson, The Servant-Messiah, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953), p. 65.

<sup>47</sup>Martin Luther, as quoted by J. T. Mueller, "Zur Bedeutung der Taufe Jesu," Concordia Theological Monthly, VI (1935), 101.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' BAPTISM IN HIS REDEMPTIVE WORK

#### The Baptism As An Act of Obedience

In the previous chapter we have endeavored to determine what significance His Baptism by John may have had for Jesus as a person. But in order to understand its full significance, we should also attempt to perceive what meaning it has in regard to His work as our Redeemer. Therefore the purpose of this chapter is to consider the significance of the Baptism of Jesus in His redemptive work. Sometimes we shall be repeating portions of what has already been stated in previous exegetical comments. But this is necessary if we wish to gain a complete view of the meaning of Jesus' baptism as related to His redemptive activity.

Although Jesus Himself was sinless, and therefore did not need baptism to demonstrate His repentance, nor to receive remission for any guilt of His own, one interpretation of His baptism that has appeared frequently is that it was an act of obedience to the will of God. If this is true, it implies that it would have been wrong for Him to refuse to be baptized by John. Thus Plummer writes: "It was God's will that all Israel should be baptized and enter the Kingdom, and God's Son, who claimed no exemption from paying tribute to the Temple (Matt. 17:25-26), claims no exemption here."<sup>1</sup> That the baptism was an act of obedience is also the thought of Alexander Campbell, who says that Jesus "submitted to

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), p. 30.

the baptism of John as an example to others to honour and obey every divine institution."<sup>2</sup> The Lange-Schaff commentary also adopts this view:

The great object was simple obedience. How to own and glorify the obedience of His dear Son, God reserved to Himself. Any confession of sin was, of course, out of the question; there was only a profession on the part of Jesus, that as an Israelite He became subject to the law, and that He was connected with humanity by ties of blood of history, of suffering, and of love.<sup>3</sup>

To regard the baptism of Jesus as an act of obedience implies therefore that Jesus placed Himself under the law like any other man. He identified Himself as a man among men, and shared the obligations which the will of God imposed upon them. We refer to the comment by Jacobus:

Jesus konnte sich von dem Werk des Täufers nicht fernhalten; er konnte sich auch nicht mit ihm identifizieren durch eine Art richterlichen Urteils über dieses, indem er selber zusagt, bis das Werk fortschritt hin zu seiner eigenen besonderen Beteiligung an ihm. Seine Haltung ihm gegenüber musste eins sein mit Identifizierung, und seine Identifizierung eins mit Anteilnahme. Nur bei einer solchen aus gleicher innerer Einstellung hervorgehenden Identifizierung mit dem Werk des Täufers: konnte das Werk der messianischen Gerechtigkeit, für das der Täufer in vorbereitendem Dienst stand, ein harmonisch und einheitlich durchgeführtes Werk sein, und nur so konnte die messianische Gerechtigkeit vollkommen erfüllt werden.<sup>4</sup>

If this is so, then Jesus must have approached the baptism with some kind of conviction, as Jacobus suggests. But what was the attitude Jesus had? Jacobus advances this answer:

Es konnte nicht die Haltung der Busse und der Abwendung von einem verderbten Leben, um sich dadurch für dieses Werk vorzubereiten, gewesen sein. Was war es denn? Die Antwort ist klar gegeben mit dem

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<sup>2</sup>Alexander Campbell, Christian Baptism (Nashville: McQuiddy Printing Company, 1913), p. 205.

<sup>3</sup>John Peter Lange, "Matthew", Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, translated by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Zondervan), XV, 77.

<sup>4</sup>K. W. Jacobus, "Zur Taufe Jesu bei Mt. 3:14,15", Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift, XL, 47-8.

Bewusstsein von seiner eigenen Persönlichkeit und von dem messianischen Werk, mit dem er zu Johannes' Taufe kam. Es war die Haltung der inneren Hingabe und der Weihe seiner Person für die Aufrichtung des Himmelsreichs, in Herz und Leben der Menschen als für das Werk, zu dem ihn der Vater berufen hatte. Und Jesus wünschte dem Ausdruck zu geben, indem er sich der Taufe unterwarf, und indem er sich seinerseits diesem Ritus unterwarf, nahm er so gut wie Johannes bei dem Vollzug der Taufe in Anspruch, dass sie damit alle Gerechtigkeit erfüllen wollten.<sup>5</sup>

According to this, then, the baptism of Jesus could be called an act of obedience involving His resignation and consecration to do the work which the Father had sent Him to do.

If we keep in mind the redemptive work for which Jesus had come into the world, and think of His Baptism as at least a partial fulfillment of that work, then it follows that His Baptism, as an act of obedience, has more significance for us and for our salvation than it had for Jesus Himself. That is, it was not something which He needed to do for His own Person or welfare, but for us and for ours. This view of the Baptism of Jesus as an act of obedience receives special emphasis by John Theodore Mueller. He writes: "Sie war nicht eine Handlung, die gleichsam nur zufällig in das Leben und Amtswirken des göttlichen Erlösers hineinschlugs; sie hatte im Gegenteil wirkliche, bleibende Bedeutung für sein ganzes Heilandswerk." He then compares baptism with circumcision: "Jesu Beschneidung und Taufe liegen gewissermassen auf gleicher Stufe; beide gehören zu dem, was Jesus als der erschienene Messias u n s a r m e n S ü n d e r n z u g u t e getan hat" (his emphasis).<sup>7</sup> Even more significant, however, is

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>6</sup>John Theodore Mueller, "Zur Bedeutung der Taufe Jesu," Concordia Theological Monthly, VI, 93.

Mueller's commentary on the choice of words Jesus used in His conversation with John just before the baptism. He declares that by the words Jesus agreed with John, that the ordinary need for baptism because of personal sinfulness did not exist in His case. Mueller continues:

Fassen wir, so das *ἅπας ἅρα* als Jesus zustimmende Antwort auf Johannes Einruf auf, so erscheint auch die weitere Erklärung Jesu: "Also gebührt es uns, alle Gerechtigkeit zu erfüllen" in einem ganz andern Licht, als man dies Worte gewöhnlich deutet. Was der Ausdruck "alle Gerechtigkeit" heisst, darüber kann kein Zweifel sein. "Alle Gerechtigkeit" bedeutet hier so viel wie "alle göttlichen Rechte und Ordnungen" oder, wie man auf englisch gesagt hat, "All requirements, all ordinances of God". Die Taufe Johannes war von Gott verordnet; sie war etwas, wozu alle sündigen Menschen verpflichtet waren. Von den Pharisäern und Schriftgelehrten urteilt Lukas, dass sie den Rat Gottes wider sich selbst (Gottes Heils--oder Erlösungsrat) verachteten, indem sie sich nicht von Johannes taufen liessen, Luk. 7:30. War nun Jesus als Mensch verpflichtet, dieser Ordnung Gottes nachzukommen? Musste er für seine Person "alle Gerechtigkeit" erfüllen? Wir finden eine Verneinung dieser so allgemein vertretenen Auffassung auch gerade in dem "also" (*οὕτως*), das sich so eng an das *ἅπας ἅρα* angliedert. Jesus sagte nicht einfach: "Es gebührt uns (*πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν*: es schickt sich für uns), alle Gerechtigkeit zu erfüllen, sc., indem ich mich [ ] taufen lasse, sondern: "A l s o (*οὕτως*) gebührt es uns, alle Gerechtigkeit zu erfüllen", das heisst, indem ich als solcher getauft werde, als den du mich soeben angedeutet hast . . . als der göttliche Messias, Johannes hatte gerurteilt: "Dich als Messias zu taufen, schickt sich nicht." Jesus Antwort lautete: "Dass du mich als Messias taufst, das schickt sich allerdings sehr wohl." Das ist die Bedeutung des "also" (*οὕτως*), in seiner nahen Verbindung mit dem zustimmenden *ἅπας ἅρα*.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, according to J. T. Mueller, the baptism was part of His redemptive work.

As such, it can well be called an act of obedience, in that Jesus did it in order to fulfill the will of God. In line with this, Mueller speaks of the Baptism of Jesus as obedience when he writes:

Die Taufe empfing Jesus an der Schwelle des Neuen Testaments, um unsern Ungehorsam durch seinen vollkommenen Gehorsam wieder gutzumachen. Er, der heilige Gottes, hat mit seiner Taufe "alle Gerechtigkeit", das ganze göttliche Gesetz, auf sich genommen, um in allen Stücken, der sündigen und verdammten Welt zum Heil, dem Vater den Gehorsam zu

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 97-8.

leisten, der für unsere Seligkeit durchaus nötig war.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, it becomes clear also why the baptism of Jesus, as an act of obedience, has great significance for us. Mueller observes:

Fragen wir daher: "Was bedeutete Jesus Taufe für uns?" so weisen wir auf Christi stellvertretenden tätigen Gehorsam hin und sagen: "Jesus hat in dem Gehorsam seiner Taufe öffentlich sein Amt angetreten, für uns das Gesetz Gottes zu erfüllen." Verstehen wir Jesu Taufe so, so verstehen wir recht und ist sie uns wahrhaft tröstlich . . .  
 . Denn nicht für sich, für seine Person, wurde Jesus mit dem Heiligen Geist und Kraft gesalbt, Apost. 10:38, sondern als unser Mittler und Erlöser, der durch seinen ganzen tätigen und leidenden Gehorsam die Welt mit Gott versöhnen sollte. Und nicht für Christi eigene Person rief der [ ] Vater vom Himmel . . . sondern dies galt ihm als unserm Heiland, der soeben in der Taufe sein Amt angetreten hatte, in dem er für uns das göttliche Gesetz erfüllen musste.<sup>9</sup>

Mueller explains what this obedience of Christ means for us when he adds:

Wir armen Sünder können des tätigen Gehorsams Jesu, seiner obedientia activa, nicht entbehren. Wie Jesus durch seinen leidenden Gehorsam (obedientia passiva), sein unschuldiges, heiliges Leiden und Sterben, den Schaden unserer Sünde gutgemacht hat, so hat er auch durch seinen Lebensgehorsam (obedientia activa) alle Gerechtigkeit für uns erfüllt, das Gesetz Gottes an unserer Statt gehalten und uns so vom Fluch und der Verdammnis des Gesetzes erlöst.<sup>10</sup>

If we consider the Baptism of Jesus as an act of obedience in the sense just described, then it means more than simple compliance with the Law. Such a view would be inadequate, as Schneider points out. In response to the suggestion that Jesus "sieht in der Johanna-Taufe eine göttliche Ordnung und beugt sich ihr," Schneider replies: "Aber mit dieser Erklärung erschöpft sich nicht der Bericht der Evangelien."<sup>11</sup> Voorhis

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-9.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>11</sup>Johannes Schneider, Die Taufe im Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1952), p. 25.



also objects to the view that Jesus was baptized because as a man He desired to conform to God's will, because this would reduce the baptism of Jesus to an act of routine, incidental conformity, one with many other such acts in His life. He furthermore remarks that the descent of the Spirit and the Voice from heaven lift it above the routine, and he asserts that since it marks the beginning of Christ's ministry, it could not be regarded as a matter of incidental import.<sup>12</sup> We agree with this. The Baptism of Jesus was more than simple obedience. But at the same time, we cannot exclude the fact that it was an act which involved obedience to the will of God, as part of His redemptive activity made necessary by man's disobedience.

#### The Baptism as a Vicarious Sharing of Man's Sin

Perhaps it seems incongruous to speak of a "vicarious sharing" as we do in the caption for this section. But the material which we shall present here seems to combine two thoughts. On the one hand there are those who propose that the Baptism of Jesus signifies His willingness and readiness to share the common sin of mankind, to be a man among men in every sense of the term. Others suggest that in His Baptism, Jesus not only shared the sin of man, but took it upon Himself as man's Substitute.

The first of these interpretations receives support from Denney, who declares that in the baptism, we must "see Jesus, at the very outset of His career, identifying Himself, as far as love enabled Him to do so, with

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<sup>12</sup>John W. Voorhis, "The Baptism of Jesus and His Sinlessness," The Evangelical Quarterly, VII (1935), 48-9.

sinful men . . . (it) was an act of loving communion with us in our misery."<sup>13</sup> According to D. J. Davies Ross, two choices confronted Jesus at the time of His Baptism. He describes the situation as a "fork in the road of His life", and pictures it this way:

He saw two possibilities stretching in front of Him. One was to do His very utmost to maintain His personal righteousness before God . . . the other was just that He should go down among sinful mankind, and share its life for love's sake, and do what He could to redeem it.<sup>14</sup>

Ross repeats and redefines this choice a little later in these words:

Either to forswear all connection with His kind, and remain solitary and aloof, in perfect integrity of conscience before God; or to plunge, at the urge of redeeming love in His heart, into the whirlpool of human life, and, in Paul's phrase, be "made sin for us, who Himself knew no sin."<sup>15</sup>

While this line of thought stresses the perfect humanity of Jesus, it does not allow for His Messianic awareness, because of His divine nature as the incarnate Son of God. But the imaginative manner in which Ross attempts to reproduce the thinking of Jesus is interesting. He says that "to answer the call of pity and love," which Jesus would do by identifying Himself as a man among men and a sharer in their guilt, would mean for Jesus

to throw away the priceless jewel of His inward peace, expose the flawless silver, God reflecting mirror of His soul to the dints and scratches that a coarse, cruel, sin-enslaved world inevitably would inflict upon it, and go, regardless of all consequence, to the help of his fallen brethren. It would involve, for His sensitive conscience,

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<sup>13</sup>James Denney, The Death of Christ (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1907), p. 252.

<sup>14</sup>D. J. Davies Ross, "The Baptism of Jesus," The Evangelical Quarterly, XVIII (October, 1946), pp. 241-42.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

being baptized with the baptism of repentance; for you could not become one with mankind and keep your own mouth free of the taste of the dust and ashes of mankind's common and universal sin.<sup>16</sup>

However, according to Denney, the Baptism of Jesus was more than an act of sharing in man's lot. By being baptized, Jesus expressed His willingness to take upon Himself the sin of mankind, and so Denney writes that

the astonishing thing is that being what He was He came to be baptized, and took His stand side by side with the people. He identified Himself with them. As far as the baptism could express it, He made all that was theirs His. It is as though He had looked on them under the oppression of their sin, and said, On Me let all that burden, all that responsibility descend.<sup>17</sup>

This statement of Denney's comes closer to explaining the Baptism of Jesus as a vicarious act than does the remark of Ross preceding it, for to share in men's guilt does not necessarily imply to suffer for it, although that may be what Ross means, too. Denney furthermore supports his view of Christ sharing the sin of men as an act of suffering for them when he interprets the Baptism of Jesus on the basis of Is. 53:

The deepest word in that chapter, He was numbered with the transgressors, is expressly applied to our Lord by Himself at a later period (Luke 22:37) . . . here in the baptism we see not the word but the thing: Jesus numbering Himself with the transgressors, submitting to be baptized with their baptism, identifying Himself with them in their relation to God as sinners, making all their responsibilities His own . . . in that hour, in the will and act of Jesus, the work of atonement was begun.<sup>18</sup>

But a still more definite statement declaring the Baptism of Jesus to be a vicarious act, undertaken in our behalf, is given by H. Vogel, who describes the event as a substitutionary act:

In the dreadful inversion which even the Baptist cannot grasp there was accomplished there something which cannot and ought not be ac-

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>17</sup>Denney, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-1.

accomplished. The baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan is marked by the mystery of substitution. It is not by chance that it denotes the beginning of His "calling" and "ministry", for from the very outset this takes place under the sign of substitution. The Father acknowledges as His Son the One who has taken the place of sinners. It is upon Him that the Holy Spirit descends. It is by Him and in Him that God acts and reveals Himself as the God who is for us and with us.<sup>19</sup>

Further implications involved in the interpretation of the Baptism of Jesus as a vicarious act come to light in the comment of Voorhis:

If we are to interpret the vicarious mission of which Jesus was conscious in terms of the New Testament, as a vicarious work of God for man, then the realization by Jesus of His Mission involved the concept of the uniqueness and the deity of His Person, through whom alone such a mission could be accomplished . . . . Thus the baptism brings together the Person and Mission of Jesus and reveals the interplay between the two. The consciousness of His Person enabled Him to understand the nature of His Mission, and the nature of His Mission rests back upon and reveals the concept of His Person, and that we should find the Person and Mission of Jesus thus present in the baptism is not surprising, for this union of the two is characteristic of the New Testament.<sup>20</sup>

But Voorhis differs with those who interpret the Baptism of Jesus as a vicarious cleansing on behalf of others. He says: "We question the vicarious cleansing of others through it" (Christ's baptism), and he asserts that it is through the Cross that men receive forgiveness by faith in Christ. He clarifies his position with this explanation:

The very point of the vicarious work of Christ is that He does for men that which men cannot do for themselves. Man cannot suffer the wages of sin and yet have eternal life. But men could be baptized, and were baptized, to receive God's cleansing and forgiveness.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>H. Vogel, "The First Sacrament: Baptism," The Scottish Journal of Theology, VII (March, 1954), 42.

<sup>20</sup>Voorhis, op. cit., pp. 44-5.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 49f.

But Voerhis still feels that the vicarious interpretation of the Baptism of Jesus has merit, if properly understood. He later explains:

If by this view, however, we mean that the baptism indicates Jesus' willingness (humanly speaking) to assume the guilt of the world that He might die for it and so save man from the consequences of his sin, then we are quite in accord with it.<sup>22</sup>

In concluding this section, we wish to refer to the comments of the Interim Report, which, when speaking of John's baptism, describes it as a New Exodus, and then discusses the Baptism of Jesus in terms of its vicarious character. The report states that it finds two main lines of thought merging in the baptism of John:

(a) This Baptism is regarded as the fulfillment of the Isaianic prophecy of the New Exodus, when God would recreate His people bringing them, as it were, once again through the waters of the Red Sea or Jordan into a new realm (especially Is. 40-52). At every Passover the original Exodus was celebrated and turned into a prophecy of the future, when the Messiah, as the new Redeemer, would visit His people. That is now about to be fulfilled, and John stands on the banks of the Jordan pointing the way through the water into the land of Messianic promise.

(b) This Baptism is also regarded as the fulfillment of the sacrificial cult of Israel, in which the laver and the altar in the temple spoke of sanctification and atonement through the washing with water and sprinkling with the blood of the covenant.<sup>23</sup>

The Report continues:

When Jesus steps down into the waters of Baptism to fulfill all righteousness, both these lines of interpretation are involved. Both are held together by the application of the Suffering-Servant prophecies to Christ, who is not only the new Servant of the Lord bringing redemption through a new Exodus, but the Lamb of God who bears the iniquity of the people, making their redemption possible. This Baptism, then, is the New Exodus through the waters, in which Jesus the Messiah opens up the Kingdom for all who in Him are baptized into the fulfillment of the Messianic promise. On the other hand, this is a Baptism

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>23</sup> Church of Scotland, Special Commission on Baptism, Interim Report of the Special Commission on Baptism (Edinburgh: Blackwell, 1956), p. 7.

which is fulfilled in Christ for others. It is a Baptism into a redemption which He alone accomplishes for all flesh, bearing and bearing away the sin of the world.<sup>24</sup>

Although the baptism of John is described as "the new Exodus", we believe it is significant that the Interim Report does not identify Jesus as the "true Israel".<sup>25</sup>

Generally speaking, it seems that the adjective "vicarious" is associated more often with the suffering and death, the passive obedience of Christ, than it is with any action, such as the Baptism, which might be called an instance of active obedience. But even in that sense the Baptism may be considered vicarious. More than that, as the following section will show, the Baptism of Jesus is connected with His suffering and death. Therefore in that respect also, the concept of vicarious action may well apply.

#### The Baptism of Jesus as Related to His Death on the Cross

Among the various interpretations of the Baptism of Jesus, probably one of the most pregnant expositions is that which relates the Baptism at the Jordan to His entire redemptive activity, and which links it ultimately and specifically to His death on the cross. Understanding what the cross meant for Jesus helps us to understand what His Baptism signifies, as Voorhis indicates in the statement:

The Cross which closes Jesus' public ministry best interprets for us the baptism which began that ministry. Set the baptism and Calvary side by side and we see how appropriate a medium was the baptism to indicate Jesus' acceptance of that principle which issued at last in

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Supra, p. 80.

the Cross. Thus the saying that "He set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem" applies not only to the time when Jesus turned finally from Galilee, but with some degree of meaning it might be applied also to that time when Jesus went down into Jordan to be baptized by John.<sup>26</sup>

The same emphasis on the connection between the Baptism and the Cross is found in the Interim Report, which discusses the Baptism in this way:

The Baptism of Jesus at the Jordan was a Baptism into the passion of the Cross which started pressing hard upon Him from the moment of His Baptism as the Son of God among sinners, until at last He was numbered with the transgressors to give His life a ransom for many. The Baptism in water at the Jordan, through the Baptism of the Spirit, led straight to the Baptism of blood on the cross.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the evidence of other Scripture references seems to support this view, as we see from the comment by Robert Law on I John 5:6: "He 'came' -- entered into the sphere of His Messianic action -- by Water and by Blood. His Baptism was the initial act, His Death the consummating act, of His self-consecration to the work of the world's redemption."<sup>28</sup>

As that last statement suggests, linking the Baptism of Jesus with His suffering and death on the cross means connecting the Baptism with the work of the Suffering Servant of God. Thus, according to Lampe's exegesis,

Our Lord at His Baptism was designated the anointed Son of God whose mission of bringing in the new covenant of the Kingdom of God was to be worked out in terms of the Servant's task of intercession and of reconciliation through suffering. In the actual Baptism, however, the work of the Servant is only prefigured, and symbolized by anticipation . . . . The role of Servant which He undertakes at His Baptism is fulfilled, not in the Jordan, but on Calvary.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Voorhis, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>27</sup>Church of Scotland, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>28</sup>Robert Law, The Tests of Life (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1914), p. 120.

<sup>29</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, The Seal of the Spirit (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1951), p. 38.

Writing on the same subject in another connection, Lampe feels that there may be other symbolic connections between the Baptism of Jesus and the Old Testament concept of the Servant, and so he proposes that

the voice which follows the descent of the dove proclaims Jesus as Son of God in terms which (in the Marcan version and the Alexandrian text of Luke) associate Messianic sonship with the role of the Servant, and perhaps in the word *δυναμεις* with that of Isaac as the son who is also the sacrificial victim. In his participation in a baptism of sinners awaiting judgment we may plausibly see a symbol of the role of the Servant as the bearer of the "sins of many", and in view of the Old Testament imagery of the flood or the depths as the symbol of death and Hades [ ] the baptism of Jesus foreshadows His death and resurrection.<sup>30</sup>

To see the Baptism of Jesus related to His suffering on the cross helps us also, in some respects, to understand the temptations which Jesus faced shortly after the Baptism. Voorhis calls this to our attention:

The acceptance by Jesus of the vicarious principle in His voluntary act of baptism indicated His readiness to undertake a spiritual ministry, the establishment of a spiritual kingdom through the giving of His own life to redeem man from sin . . . the drive of the temptations was to bring Jesus to attempt the establishment of that kingdom by means other than the cross . . . but the drive of the temptations to eliminate Calvary struck at the very principle to which Jesus had dedicated Himself by His act of Baptism . . . the temptation to desert His redemptive, vicarious mission did not cease with the wilderness victory . . . this temptation was ever upon Him . . . but to the bitter end the decision of the baptism held.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise J. Warns concludes that "the baptism of Jesus is thus the declaration of His readiness to suffer and die".<sup>32</sup> He declares:

He now begins His Messianic career. He is the Lamb of God who is willing to take the place of the sinner. To this willingness . . . He gave expression by asking John to baptize Him and by permitting Himself to be baptised. He who bore the sin of the world, de-

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<sup>30</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, "Baptism in the New Testament", Scottish Journal of Theology, V (June, 1952), 167-68.

<sup>31</sup>Voorhis, op. cit., pp. 45-6.

<sup>32</sup>Johannes Warns, Baptism, translated by G. H. Lang (London: Paternoster Press, 1957), p. 20.



clared Himself by His baptism ready to endure death and that the judgment upon sin should be executed upon Himself. This is the significance of the baptism of Jesus.<sup>33</sup>

Another recent exponent of this interpretation of the Baptism of Jesus is Oscar Cullmann, whose book, Baptism in the New Testament, was not only one of the major sources for our research, but one of the chief stimulations for the writing of this Thesis. Cullmann begins to unfold his interpretation with his comments on the words spoken by the Voice from heaven. According to his exposition,

Christ at his Baptism is not yet proclaimed King but only the servant of God. His Lordship appears later, after his resurrection; but first of all he has to complete the work of the suffering Servant of God in direct connection with the meaning of Johannine baptism, and in fulfillment of this meaning.<sup>34</sup>

Cullmann believes that Jesus' answer to John the Baptist, "to fulfill all righteousness," has a singular meaning, and the word *πᾶσιν* is very important in that it indicates that "Jesus will effect a general forgiveness."<sup>35</sup> Thus, Cullmann observes, Jesus "is distinguished from the mass of other baptized people, who are baptised for their own sins, as the One called to the Office of the Servant of God who suffers for all others."<sup>36</sup> Cullman thus believes that the concept of Messiah and the concept of the suffering Servant, which previously had been kept separate in Jewish religious thought, are now drawn together, and he states that "connection between the two is first made through the life of Jesus." With this in-

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>34</sup>Oscar Cullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 17.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

mind he writes: "Thus the Baptism of Jesus points forward to the end, to the climax of his life, the Cross, in which alone all Baptism will find its fulfilment."<sup>37</sup> Cullmann supports his case in the words:

This explanation is confirmed by the meaning which the word *βαπτίζω* has for Jesus . . . . For Him, to 'be baptised' from now on meant to suffer, to die for his people. This is not a pure guess; it is confirmed by each of the two sayings in which Jesus uses the word *βαπτίζωμαι* : Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50. In Mark 10:38, "can ye be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?", "be baptised" means "die." See also Luke 12:50: "I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straightened till it be accomplished?" Here also "be baptised" means just "die." On both occasions it is Jesus who speaks. In the reference of the word "baptise" to death it is his own death that is implied. Only in a derivative way can the same expression be extended also to the disciples.<sup>38</sup>

Cullmann further explains this to mean that at the moment of His atoning death, Jesus completes a "general" baptism for all men, and he asserts that this is the foundation of "Baptismal grace", in that it belongs to the essence of this general Baptism effected by Jesus, that it is offered in entire independence of the decision of faith and understanding of those who benefit from it.<sup>39</sup> While this last statement applies specifically to the "atoning death", of Jesus, Cullmann believes that the Baptism, as the beginning of Jesus' redemptive work as the suffering Servant, is definitely related to the completion of that work on the Cross, and he points to the Gospel of John for even stronger support of this view:

While the relation of the Baptism of Jesus to his representative suffering and death is apparent in the synoptic account only in the context of the voice from heaven which refers to Is. 42:1, the Johannine Gospel is clearer at this point. The Baptist draws a conclusion from the heavenly voice and declares that Jesus is *ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ Ἀγίου ὁ ἀπαρ*

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

τὴν ἐμπειρίαν τοῦ Κόσμου. Thus he rightly understood the call as a demand upon Jesus to fulfill the Ebed-Jahwe mission.<sup>40</sup>

But not all interpreters agree with Cullmann's view. One of those who takes exception to it is Johannes Schneider. He declares:

Cullmann sieht in diesem Sachverhalt auch die letzte Wurzel für die Tauflehre des Paulus in Röm. 6 h.a.w.: Die Tatsache, dass die christliche Taufe bei Paulus Teilnahme an Christi Tod und Auferstehung ist, hat nach Cullmann ihren letzten Grund in der Tatsache, dass Jesus selber seinen Tod mit der Taufe gleichgesetzt hat. Das ist ein geistvolle Hypothese. Aber ich glaube nicht, dass aus Mk. 1:11 und Mt. 3:17 so weitreichende Schlüsse gezogen werden dürfen.<sup>41</sup>

Cullmann was not the first to foster his interpretation. But the view came under criticism even before his book was published. In The Historic Mission of Jesus, Cecil John Cadoux denies that the baptism of Jesus was an initiation to His passion and death. He maintains that to suggest such an interpretation

is gravely to overstrain the evidence. Baptism stood indeed for initiation into a new religious life, whether for the Gentiles converted to Judaism, for the converts of John the Baptist, or for those who later entered the Christian Church. Jesus' use of the term 'baptism' when alluding to his death was clearly metaphorical, the idea common to the two experiences being that of an epoch-making ordeal. But apart from the later experience of Jesus himself, there was nothing in the nature of baptism as such which would suggest the solemn acceptance of the prospect of death.<sup>42</sup>

Nor do all agree that Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50 may be regarded as a basis for linking the Baptism of Jesus with his death on the cross. In reference to these passages, Oepke comments:

Nach Mk. 10:38f; Lk. 12:50 hätte Jesus sein Sterben einmal als in

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>41</sup>Schneider, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>42</sup>Cecil John Cadoux, The Historic Mission of Jesus (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), pp. 185-86.

βάπτισμα, βαπτισθῆναι bezeichnet. Dass die spätere Vorstellung vom Martyrium als Bluttaufe hier bereits einwirken sollte, ist schwer anzunehmen. Aber auch dass Jesus von der Auffassung der Johannaestaufe (und der zukünftigen christlichen Taufe?) als eines freiwilligen Sterbens ausgeht, lässt sich aus dieser vereinselten Aussage nicht erweisen und ist . . . wenig wahrscheinlich. Gewiss ist nicht undenkbar, dass Jesus in einer kühnen und tief sinnigen, für seine Umgebung freilich kaum verständlichen Bildrede den Ertrag der religionsgeschichtlichen Entwicklung von Jahrzehnten vorweggenommen hat.<sup>43</sup>

A study of the passages under consideration, Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50 does not warrant the conclusion that there Jesus is speaking of His Baptism in the Jordan. He is obviously using the words βάπτισμα and βαπτισθῆναι in a metaphorical sense, and the tense employed in the verb forms is not related to what happened in the past. In Mark 10:38, Jesus uses the present middle βαπτίζομαι with the aorist passive infinitive βαπτισθῆναι. In Luke 12:50, He says: βαπτισμα δὲ ἔχω βαπτισθῆναι. In this passage He uses the present active ἔχω with the noun βάπτισμα and the aorist passive infinitive βαπτισθῆναι. However, if we interpret the present tense to indicate that His entire life as the Servant of God is here described as a baptism, then there might be good reason for finding a deeper significance in these words than these at first sight suggest. Thus the Interim Report concludes that the Baptism at the Jordan does point forward to the Cross:

That is the deepest significance of Jesus' words: "I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straightened until it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50; cf. Mark 10:38; Matt. 20:22). The Johannine writer explicitly mentions the water and the blood which flowed from the side of Christ on the Cross, probably in order to show the unity of water and blood in the BAPTISMA of Christ on our behalf (John 19:34f). And so he says in his first Epistle: "This is he who came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ: not by water only but by water and

<sup>43</sup>Albrecht Oepke, "βάπτω, βαπτίζω", Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel, I (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933), 536.

blood . . . . In other words, using language from St. Paul, there is only ONE BAPTISM (HEN BAPTISMA) the Baptism of Christ in water, Spirit and blood, the Baptism with which He was baptized for all, and in which we are given to share through the Sacrament of Baptism in water and Spirit.<sup>44</sup>

Later the Interim Report again refers to the words of Jesus in Mark 10:56, "the baptism with which I am being baptized", and comments that

It is the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan that binds His birth with His death -- His circumcision with His crucifixion. Thus the whole earthly existence of Christ in the form of a Servant was by Himself called His Baptism (Mark 10:38) . . . . The two terminal events of that Baptism were His birth and His ascension, but between them was the whole life and ministry of obedience and reconciliation, especially in the crucifixion and resurrection. What happened in fact and in flesh at His birth was given sacramental enactment and signification when He was baptized among sinners and consecrated for His mission of reconciliation. In His Baptism in the Jordan His death and resurrection were given sacramental anticipation, for it was with His actual Baptism that Jesus stepped forth to inaugurate the Messianic Age, to bring in the Kingdom of God opening it to all who follow Him.<sup>45</sup>

We believe that Jesus employs the term "baptism" in Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50 in a metaphorical sense. But we note that not all agree that this is a valid reason for objecting to the suggestion that Jesus here links His Baptism with His suffering and death. As we have seen above, Cadoux is one who raises that very objection.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Lampe claims that in more than one instance, Jesus looked back to His Baptism and did link it with His death. He asserts that in Mark 10:38, Jesus uses two metaphors to describe His coming death: τὸ ποτήριον ὃ ἐγὼ πίνω and τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι and he declares:

<sup>44</sup>Church of Scotland, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>46</sup>Supra, p. 102.

The former metaphor looks forward to the Last Supper cup of the blood of the Covenant, the latter backward, in the first instance, to the Baptism by John, but also forward to the Servant's atoning death in which the Symbolism of the Baptism finds its fulfillment.<sup>47</sup>

Lampe continues his line of thought by referring to the parallel passage in Luke 12:50, and by connecting it with Mark 10:38 sees there a proof that "our Lord interpreted His Baptism as fore shadowing His death."<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, Lampe maintains that Jesus was accustomed to symbolic language and various types of metaphors, and he uses the absence of the account of the Lord's Supper in the Fourth Gospel as the basis for this remark:

In this narrative, the sharing of the cup of the covenant in Christ's blood is replaced by the acted symbolism of the Servant -- a dramatization of such sayings as those recorded in Luke 12:37, 22:27, and Mark 10:42-5 -- in which Jesus associates His disciples with Himself in His cleansing and atoning death, and for that end makes use of baptismal symbolism that corresponds to the Eucharistic symbols of bread and wine in the Synoptic narratives. Christ's Baptism as it was completed and given its full significance in His death, is therefore most intimately linked with the Last Supper, and we conclude that neither the 'cup' nor the 'baptism' of Mark 10:38 is an accidental metaphor.<sup>49</sup>

Lampe's suggestion that the "cup" metaphor is a reference to the Lord's Supper might be questioned. But in using the term "baptism" Jesus chose as His metaphor not only a word that could have a symbolic meaning (referring to His death), but also one by which He meant to allude to His own Baptism by John.

This does not imply that in Mark 10:38 Jesus was referring only to His death on the cross. Speaking on this passage, Robinson comments:

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<sup>47</sup> Lampe, The Seal of the Spirit, p. 39.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

The passage occurs in a context heavily laden with prediction of the Passion. But it would be a mistake to jump to the conclusion that the baptism of which Jesus speaks is simply His death . . . . The baptism of Jesus is His whole existence in the form of a servant, all that is included in His being upon earth "not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10: 45)."<sup>50</sup>

Therefore Robinson believes that Ignatius (ad Eph. 18:2) was right in advancing this interpretation of Christ's baptism centuries ago. He remarks:

When Ignatius says of Jesus that He was "baptized that by His submission (or, by His passion, τῷ πόντῳ) He might cleanse the water," he rightly divined the connexion between the baptism and death of Christ. The Fourth Gospel also sees already in the figure coming to John for baptism "the lamb of God (cf. Is. 53:7) which taketh away (or, beareth ?); cf. Is. 53:4 the sin of the world (John 1:29)."<sup>51</sup>

To explain his interpretation, Robinson adds that "the baptism is the anticipation of the Cross, in which Jesus in Jordan foresuffered all, and as such it gives to the Cross and all that lies between the two events its own character of baptism."<sup>52</sup> He relates this to the Servant passages of Isaiah in this way:

The essential meaning of Jesus' baptism is precisely that He was "numbered with the transgressors" and "bare the sins of many" (Is. 52:12). He entered upon it "to fulfill all righteousness" . . . or, in the words again of Is. 42:1, "He will bring forth judgment for the nations" . . . . Jesus' acceptance of baptism at the hands of John is therefore the beginning of that baptism of vicarious suffering which could only be completed in the Cross.<sup>53</sup>

Thus Robinson concludes that the Baptism of Jesus, consummated on the Cross, is basic for the Sacrament of Baptism in the Church, for he asserts:

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<sup>50</sup>Robinson, op. cit., p. 289.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 261

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

The baptism of Jesus, as He Himself saw, is made complete only in His death . . . . The Cross is the consummation of the baptism, and consequently, truly considered, it is on the Cross that the world's baptism takes place. Hence the fount and origin of the Church's sacrament is not an isolated word of institution but the body of the Crucified Himself.<sup>54</sup>

But if the Baptism foreshadows the suffering and death of Christ, then it also foretells His resurrection and ascension. Therefore Robinson says:

But -- and this is equally significant for the understanding of Christian baptism as the act in which the Christian not merely dies but rises with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12) -- the baptism of Jesus is likewise the anticipation of His resurrection and ascension.<sup>55</sup>

Likewise H. Vogel finds in the Baptism of Jesus a reference to both His death and His resurrection:

The baptism of John, to which the Messiah proclaimed by him submitted "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15), points to the baptism in which He fulfilled and executed the righteousness of God as the Holy One of God slain on the accursed tree of the law which we had not fulfilled. The going down and rising again in John's baptism -- as it is indeed fulfilled by the mystery of the One who takes our place -- points as such to another going down and rising again in the reality of His death and resurrection from the dead.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, we refer also to the comments of Apostolos Makrakis who uses the picture of a stormy sea in which men are drowning to explain the significance of the Baptism of Jesus:

Such as this is the baptism of Christ -- a baptism of salvation of us who are at the bottom of the sea and being subjected to hardships and maltreatment, and a work of righteousness. The work of Christ is called a baptism because, just as one that is trying to save a drowning man voluntarily dives into the sea, and struggles against

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 263-64.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 261-62.

<sup>56</sup>H. Vogel, "The First Sacrament: Baptism", Scottish Journal of Theology, VII (March, 1954), 43.



it, and risks his own life, so and in like manner Christ, who is trying to save us who are being overwhelmed in the sea of life, dived down from heaven into this sea of life, and, after struggling against the wind and waves and being slain, was revived by the power of God and at the same time provided for the salvation of all those who have gratefully accepted His aid.<sup>57</sup>

As we review the comments assembled above, and recall that the Baptism of Jesus is generally regarded as the beginning of His ministry, we believe that there is valid reason for interpreting the Baptism as an act which points forward to the Cross, that Jesus thus does allude to His own Baptism in Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50, and that it plays an important part in His redemptive activity as the suffering Servant, the promised Messiah, and the Saviour of the world.

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<sup>57</sup>Apostolos Makrakis, "A Supplementary Monograph on Baptism" in The Interpretation of the Gospel Law and Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, translated by D. Cummings (Chicago: The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1953), p. 43.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AS INTERPRETED BY LUTHERAN THEOLOGIANS

We have generally reserved the thought of Lutheran theologians on the Baptism of Jesus for discussion at this time, and have quoted from Lutheran theologians only occasionally.<sup>1</sup> In order to summarize the position of the Lutheran Church on the Baptism of Jesus, we shall now consider a few of the major points involved in the Baptism of Jesus in the light of Lutheran theological thought.

The Lutheran Symbols have little to say on the subject. In fact, we were able to locate but one reference to the Baptism of Jesus. Under the section "Of Baptism" we find this statement in The Large Catechism:

you must honor Baptism and esteem it glorious on account of the Word, since He Himself has honored it both by words and deeds; moreover, confirmed it with miracles from heaven. For do you think it was a jest that, when Christ was baptized, the heavens were opened and the Holy Ghost descended visibly, and everything was divine glory and majesty?<sup>2</sup>

However, this reference does little more than encourage us to honor Baptism. The statement throws no light on the significance of the Baptism of Jesus.

Because Jesus was baptized by John, it is fitting to begin by reviewing Lutheran interpretations of John's Baptism. In doing this, we find ourselves in a somewhat peculiar situation because some Lutheran

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<sup>1</sup>Supra, pp. 55, 59, 64ff., 69ff., and 89ff.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther, "Of Baptism," The Large Catechism in Triglott Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 737.

theologians do not say what Luther does about the baptism of John. Luther believed that the baptism of John differed from the Christian Sacrament of Baptism. He claims that it was a baptism of repentance, not a sacrament conferring the forgiveness of sins. In his sermon on John 1:30-34, dated "the Saturday after St. Elisabeth's day, November 24, 1537", Luther declares that John himself points out the difference between Christ's Baptism and his own when he says:

"I baptize with water, I do not confer the Holy Spirit. Thus I do not forgive sin. But the aim and end of my preaching is to lead men to repentance and to prepare them for the advent of the Lord, who is to bestow the forgiveness of sin on them." John points to Christ. He does not forgive sins, but he says: "After me will come one who whose Baptism will not only serve the purpose of repentance but will carry with it the remission of sin." . . . His Baptism pointed to the Holy Spirit, whom Christ was to bring and bestow. John's Baptism directed men to the future forgiveness of sin, which was very close at hand. It was not yet present. Nor was John empowered to confer it; therefore he baptized for repentance and a future forgiveness of sin.<sup>3</sup>

Luther continues by saying that John's Baptism is no longer valid because "in John's Baptism forgiveness is promised; in Christ's Baptism it is given."<sup>4</sup> He further explains this by saying:

In two respects the Baptism of John was different from that of Christ. In the first place, John admonished all to repentance and to preparation for the coming Christ. In the second place, he told his hearers to wait for the forgiveness of sin, which would be brought by one who was yet to come. His Baptism bore the promise of a future forgiveness of sin through Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Even more persuasive are the references which Bromley supplies from Luther's Disputatio de baptisate legis. Bromley observes that in Thesis I

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<sup>3</sup>Martin Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John", translated by Martin H. Bertram, Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), XXII, 176.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

Luther lists three different types of baptism: the baptism of the flesh, of repentance, and of grace ("Lex baptismi carnis, Johannes baptismi poenitentiae, Christus baptismi gratiae habet"), and that Luther concludes that those who were baptized of John needed to be rebaptized with the baptism of Christ (Th. XII: "Ob quam causam baptistate a Johanne denuo baptisandi fuerunt baptismate Christi").<sup>6</sup> In the Smalcald Articles, Luther writes: "John, preceding Him (Christ) is called a preacher of repentance, however, for the remission of sins," but then qualified this by adding: "John was to accuse all, and convict them of being sinners, that they might . . . be prepared for the Lord, to receive grace, and to expect and accept from Him the remission of sins."<sup>7</sup>

We have previously noted that Lutheran theologians referred to by Eckhardt<sup>8</sup> regarded John's baptism a means of grace like Christian Baptism. Therefore they do not interpret John's baptism in the same way that Luther does. For example, M. Leimer asserts that: "Die lutherischen Theologen lehren im allgemeinen, dass kein wesentlicher Unterschied zwischen Christi Taufe und der Taufe des Johannes bestehe." He mentions F. Pieper, M. Chemnitz, J. Gerhard, and Agidius Hunnius as men who hold "dass die Taufe Johannis Vergebung der Sünden, den Heiligen Geist und auch die ewige Seligkeit darreichte und mittelte."<sup>9</sup> On the witness of John the Baptist, "I

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<sup>6</sup>G. W. Bromley, "Aspects of Luther's Doctrine of Baptism," The Evangelical Quarterly, XVII (Oct., 1945), 281-83.

<sup>7</sup>Martin Luther, The Smalcald Articles in Triglot Concordia (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 481, 6.

<sup>8</sup>Supra, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup>M. Leimer, "Die Taufe Johannis des Täufers in ihrem Verhältnis zu Christi Taufe," Concordia Theological Monthly, XIV (March, 1943), 197.

baptize you with water; but He who comes after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8, Matt. 3:11), Leimer comments:

Er will damit nicht sagen, dass seine Taufe nicht den Heiligen Geist gebe. Einmal sagt uns Johannes damit ausdrücklich, dass Gott zum Taufen Wasser zu gebrauchen eingesetzt hat. Sodann zeigt er uns, der grosse Gegensatz, den er hiermit hoch hervorhebt, ist der: Ich, will Johannes sagen, taufe auf göttlichen Befehl und bin ein menschlicher Diener Gottes. Christus ist der Höhere, der Gottessohn, der einzige Heilmittler, der die Vergebung der Sünden erwirbt und uns den Heiligen Geist aus eigener Macht mitteilt. Das ist der gewaltige Unterschied. Aber nirgends lehrt und setzt Johannes einen Unterschied zwischen seiner und Christi Taufe.<sup>10</sup>

Leimer also interprets John's remark about the "Stronger One" coming after him as a prophecy pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, and claims that this remark therefore does not suggest any difference between John's Baptism and that which Jesus instituted. Furthermore, Leimer says: "Warum Christus und Johannes so häufig Johannes Taufe mit Christi Ausgiessung des Heiligen Geistes zusammenstellen, sagen sie uns nicht, und es wäre zwecklos, darüber allerlei Vermutungen ausszusprechen."<sup>11</sup> In view of all this, Leimer arrives at this conclusion about John's Baptism: "Sie war in Wirklichkeit das göttliche Sakrament der heiligen Taufe im Neuen Testament, wie die Taufe Christi zu Pfingsten. Sie übte auch dieselbe Kraft und Wirkung aus wie Christi Taufe."<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to Luther's statement that the Baptism of John was "for repentance and a future forgiveness of sin,"<sup>13</sup> Pieper speaks out against

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>13</sup>Supra, p. 110.

a similar view held by Thomasius, and reasons that "a remission of sins of a 'somewhat preparatory and external nature' makes no sense. You either have remission of sins or have it not."<sup>14</sup> In his harmony, The Gospels, J. Ylvisaker recognizes the tendency among theologians "to consider the baptism of John simply as a symbol of purification", but he says: "It may not well be denied, however, that the baptism of John mediated the forgiveness of sin. It is expressly stated that it was a baptism for the remission of sins," and he adds that this is the same expression used in connection with Acts 2:38. He also remarks that

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus must have had John's baptism in mind when He says: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot . . ." (John 3:5), for Nicodemus knew no other baptism . . . . But if it be true that Jesus refers in this passage to the baptism of John, then His own words are proof of the fact that John's baptism was a means of regeneration.<sup>15</sup>

He continues by pointing out that in contrast to the Council of Trent, which condemned those "who attribute to the baptism of John the same efficacy as the baptism of Christ," Gerhard, speaking for the Lutheran Church, asserts that no essential difference exists between these two baptisms:

In certain non-essentials, as also in regard to the effectiveness of the spiritual gifts, we recognize that there was a distinction between the baptism of John and that of Christ and His disciples; but that there was any essential difference we deny.<sup>16</sup>

What little distinction Lutheran theologians did note may be gathered from this comment by Chemnitz, who is quoted by Heinrich Schmid as saying:

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<sup>14</sup>Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, edited by W. W. F. Albrecht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), III, 239.

<sup>15</sup>Joh. Ylvisaker, The Gospels (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1932), p. 111.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

The same difference that exists between the word concerning Christ to come, Christ coming, and Christ exhibited, exists between circumcision, the Baptism of John, and the Baptism of Christ. But although as to the mode of publication of the doctrine concerning Christ there may be some difference, yet as to its substance it has been the same and has had the same effects on believers in every age.<sup>17</sup>

It is not the purpose of this thesis to reconcile the difference which exists here between Luther and Lutheran theologians, but we ought not overlook it.

On the other hand, Lutheran theologians generally do agree with Luther on His interpretation of the Baptism of Jesus by John. For one thing, they agree that it marks the beginning of His public office and ministry. In fact, Luther speaks of the Baptism of Jesus not only as the beginning of His ministry, but as the beginning of the New Testament itself, for he declares:

Die selige Taufe des Herrn ist der Anfang des ganzen Neuen Testaments. Heut ist zu End und abgeschlossen das Alte Testament, alle Verheissungen Moses hören auf. Denn indem der Herr getauft ist, ist er zum Doktor, Herrn, und Fürsten verordnet, der nun sein Amt angetreten hat, wie es denn auch Lukas alsbald (4:14ff.) erzählt hat; heute ist er gekrönt und zum Doktor gemacht und ihm das Amt des Neuen Testaments befohlen worden, dass er ein Herr und Heiland sei, wie denn auch die Engel schon gemeldet haben (Lk. 2:11).<sup>18</sup>

Therefore when Jesus says: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand," (Mark 1:15), Luther declares:

Christus Amt gehet allererst an nach seiner Taufe, da ihm der Vater verkläret und bezeuget. Und da führet auch das neue Testament und

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<sup>17</sup>Martin Chemnitz, (Ex.C.Trd., II, 66), as quoted by Heinrich Schmid in The Doctrinal Theology of the Ev. Lutheran Church, translated by C. A. Hay and H. E. Jacobs, (Philadelphia: Luth. Pub. Society, 1878), p. 556.

<sup>18</sup>Martin Luther, D. Martin Luthers Ewangelien Auslegung, edited by Erwin Milhaupt, (Göttingen: Vandenhoech und Ruprecht, 1939), II, 14.

die Zeit der Gnaden an, nicht an der Geburt Christi, wie er auch selbst sagt Marc. 1 (v.15).<sup>19</sup>

We find a similar thought in one of his sermons on Matthew 3:13-17: "Das sei jetzt kürzlich gesagt von diesem schönen Text, darinnen der rechte Anfang des neuen Testaments, und die Summa des ganzen Evangelii von Gott selbst gefasset und uns gegeben ist."<sup>20</sup> Though Lutheran theologians may not seem so bold as to identify the Baptism of Jesus with the beginning of the New Testament, they do consider it the public ordination of Jesus' ministry. Thus C. T. Heuer writes:

Es war für ihn die Taufe die Öffentliche Weihe zu seinem öffentlichen Amt, das er jetzt antreten wollte, eine Weihe, die durch die offenbarung Gottes noch herrlicher und eindrucksvoller gemacht wurde. Luther sagt hierüber: "Da fängt Christus an, ein Christus zu sein; da wird er eingeweiht, tritt in sein Amt; und hat der Vater die Welt wollen gewiss machen, dass sie ganz nicht Zweifel sollte an Christo haben, darum dass er ihn hat selber bestätigt" (XI, 2130, #3).<sup>21</sup>

Likewise G. Stoeckhardt speaks of the Baptism of Jesus in this manner:

Er unterzog sich der Taufe der armen Sünder und erklärte sich damit feierlich bereit, auch durch sein ferneres Thun und Leiden für die Sünde der Welt zu büßen und genugsathun . . . . Mit seiner Taufe ist Jesus in sein Christusamt, in sein Erlöseramt, in sein prophetisches, hohepriesterliches, königliches Berufsleben öffentlich eingetreten.<sup>22</sup>

So also Ylvisaker comments that "Jesus is about to enter upon His public career as the servant of Jehovah, in the performance of His work of redemp-

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<sup>19</sup>Martin Luther, Sämtliche Werke (Erlangen), X, 127.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., XVI, 86.

<sup>21</sup>C. T. Heuer, "Jesus wird von Johannes getauft", Johannes der Täufer, Synodal-Bericht des Minnesota Distrikts (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1912), pp. 42-3.

<sup>22</sup>G. Stoeckhardt, "Die Taufe Jesu," Die biblische Geschichte des Neuen Testaments (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1906), p. 23.



tion, and for this mission He must be anointed and consecrated by the Father, through the baptism of John."<sup>23</sup>

Another facet of the significance of the Baptism of Jesus which Luther and Lutheran exegetes both emphasize is its character as an act of obedience to fulfill all righteousness. This factor receives special attention from J. T. Mueller, to whose comments we referred earlier.<sup>24</sup>

Heuer also supports this interpretation:

Christus wollte als Messias auftreten, als solcher stand er da an der Menschen Statt, er repräsentierte tatsächlich in seiner Person die gesamte Menschheit. Und was nun für die Menschen göttliches Recht und göttliche Ordnung war, das wollte Jesus erfüllen. Er stand im Begriff, alles auf sich zu nehmen, was den Menschen zukam, und so gebührte es ihm auch, die von Gott für die Menschen bestimmte Taufe Johannes an sich vollziehen zu lassen.<sup>25</sup>

The same factor is considered by Ylvisaker, who asserts that

Jesus submitted to the divine will. It was a part of His obedience to comply with the demands of His calling, and baptism was His dedication to the life of obedience and suffering which now awaited Him, or, as Bugge says, His solemn acceptance of His mission as the Messiah and His sacred pledge to dedicate Himself to this work with unquestioned devotion.<sup>26</sup>

Again, Luther and Lutheran theologians agree that the Voice from heaven and the descent of the Spirit indicated that now Jesus was prepared for His mission in a special way. Discussing the Voice from heaven,

Heuer remarks that by this

ist Christus aber auch feierlich und unverzüglich bestätigt als der, der da-kommen sollte, als der von Gott der Welt gesandte Heil-

<sup>23</sup>Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>24</sup>Supra, p. 89ff.

<sup>25</sup>Heuer, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>26</sup>Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 116.

and. Ja, er wird hier feierlich zu seinem Amte auf Erden geweiht und gleichsam eingesegnet, Er wird hier nach seiner menschlichen Natur angetan mit Kraft aus der Höhe, er wird zu seinem einzigartigen Erlösgrante gesalbt mit dem Freudenöle des Heiligen Geistes ohne Mass.<sup>27</sup>

This does not mean that Jesus had not possessed the Holy Spirit before His Baptism, for Stoeckhardt assures us: "Was Jesus von Anfang an besass, und swar im vollsten Maass, hat er gleichwohl von Neuem aus des Vaters Hand hingecommen."<sup>28</sup> This interpretation receives further development from Ylvisaker, who comments:

His baptism is not simply the acceptance of the office as our Prophet, High Priest, and King with the pledge that He will perform properly the duties of the office -- it is also His divine preparation for His exalted mission as the Messiah. The baptism did not only betoken a new phase in His life, nor was it simply a symbol of a mere spiritual emotion. Jesus is now anointed with the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:38). Jesus is not the person acting, but the One who is acted upon. He had the Spirit, for He was conceived of the Spirit, and the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily. But nevertheless He is now made recipient of the Spirit. Ghemnitz says: "The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, not as though He were without the Spirit, the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him; but because it was prophesied that the Messiah, when He became our Mediator, should be anointed, not with oil, but with the Holy Ghost (Ps. 45:8; Is. 61:1), in order that all might rest assured that He was the Prophet whom they should hear."<sup>29</sup>

Later Ylvisaker explains this more fully when he adds: "We must remember likewise that Jesus had the Spirit as the spirit of life, not only as God, but also as man; now He received the Spirit as the Spirit of His office and as the Spirit of power, without measure," and he adds that Jesus as a man was "in need of the equipment and preparation by the Spirit for the duties of His work."<sup>30</sup> Luther takes a similar view, when he comments on

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<sup>27</sup>Hauer, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>28</sup>Stoeckhardt, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>29</sup>Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

the words "an dem ich Wohlgefallen habe"; "Hiermit weihest du ihm auch zum Pfaffen oder Priester; gleichwie der 110. Ps. 4, ihm 'einen ewigen Priester' nennet, als der ewig vor Gott stehe, uns zu versöhnen und zu vertreten."<sup>51</sup> On the significance of the descent of the Spirit as a dove, Ylvisaker declares:

That the Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove implies that He had assumed the form of a natural dove, had clothed Himself in the shape of a dove. The symbolism is twofold. A body is a completed entity. It is the Spirit in His entirety or His fulness that He receives. And the dove is in Scripture an emblem of peaceableness, meekness, simplicity (Cant. 1:15; 2:14; Hos. 7:11; Matt. 10:16). The point is not whether the dove is such a creature, but what it symbolizes in Scripture. And the truth, which the dove symbolizes, is emblematic of the entire activity of Christ, a contrast in this respect to that of the prophet Elijah. It is the spirit of the Gospel, as opposed to the spirit of the Law.<sup>52</sup>

Luther also notes the contrast between Law and Gospel. He observes that while at Mt. Sinai there was a "terrifying spectacle", at the Baptism of Jesus everything was

lovely, comforting, and joyful; the Father most kindly allows his voice to be heard, saying that he is well pleased with the Son, the Son standing there in his manhood and allowing himself to be baptized for our benefit, and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove.<sup>53</sup>

But the most obvious similarity between Luther's comments on the Baptism of Jesus and those of Luthoran theologians is found in their interpretation that it was a vicarious act, through which Christ has taken upon Himself our sins. Thus Luther asserts that Jesus accepted baptism

for the reason that he was entering into our stead, indeed, our person, that is becoming a sinner for us, taking upon himself the sins which he had not committed, and wiping them out and drowning them

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<sup>51</sup>Luther, Sämtliche Werke (Erlangen), XVI, 81.

<sup>52</sup>Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>53</sup>Luther, Luther's Works (Concordia-Mühlenberg), II, 319.

in his holy baptism. And . . . he did this in accord with the will of God, the heavenly Father, who cast all our sins upon him that he might bear them and not only cleanse us from them through his baptism and make satisfaction for them on the Cross, but also clothe us in his holiness and adorn us with his innocence.<sup>34</sup>

Eckhardt indicates the vicarious nature of Jesus' baptism in the comment:

"Für seine Person bedurfte Christus der Taufe nicht. Auf ihm lagen die Sünden der Welt; Zur Vergebung ihrer Sünden liess sich Christus taufen und erfüllte alle Gerechtigkeit."<sup>35</sup> Again, Luther says that by His Baptism, Jesus "hat die Welt . . . von allen Sünden gewaschen und gereinigt, und den Tod ersüflet, und also das menschliche Geschlecht mit Gott versüfmet."<sup>36</sup> Heuer says:

Auf Jesu lagen die Sünden aller Menschen. Zur Vergebung ihrer Sünden geschah die Taufe Jesu. Davon sagt Luther: "Johannes kriegt allhier einen Sünder, der keine Sünde für seine Person hat, und ist doch der grösste Sünder, der aller Welt Sünde hat und trägt. Darum er sich auch lässt taufen und bekennt mit solcher Tat, dass er ein Sünder sein. Aber nicht für sich, sondern für uns . . . Und muss sich lassen taufen zur Vergebung der Sünden, nicht für seine Person, die unschuldig und unbefleckt ist, sondern um unsertwillen, welcher Sünde er trägt." (VII, 691f, #23f.)<sup>37</sup>

Stoekhardt develops the vicarious aspect of the Baptism of Jesus by noting that Jesus not only took upon Himself the sins of the people, but took their place even in atoning for all sins, because by their own repentance the people could not rid themselves of their sins. Thus he says that by His willingness to be baptized, Jesus

erklärte damit, dass er alle Gerechtigkeit erfüllen und an Statt

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>35</sup>Eckhardt, op. cit., p. 840.

<sup>36</sup>Luther, Sämtliche Werke (Erlangen), XVI, 107.

<sup>37</sup>Heuer, op. cit., p. 43.

seines Volkes sich der Sündenbusse unterziehen wolle. Er wollte für die Sünder büßen und die Sünden des Volkes selber sühnen. Nach dem Zeugnis des Propheten und des Evangelisten sprach Johannes nur die Forderung der Busse aus. Damit war nicht gesagt, dass Israel sich selber seiner Sünden entledigen könne. Vielmehr kam nun, nachdem die Sünder und Zöllner ihre Sünden bekannt hatten, Jesus hinterdrein und erfüllte für sie alle Gerechtigkeit, nahm ihre Sünden, die sie beichtend gleichsam in das Jordanwasser niedergelegt hatten, indem er in der Jordan stieg, auf seinen Rücken und machte die Reinigung ihrer Sünden durch sich selbst. . . . So war der Jesus, von dem Johannes zeugt, wirklich der Erlöser, der aus Zion kommen sollte.<sup>38</sup>

Lenski does not believe that Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the people at His Baptism. He contends that

Luther's view strains the words by attempting to give the same significance to Christ's baptism as is given to that of the sinners who flocked to the Jordan, Christ coming with the sins of others and having them washed away, the others having their own sins removed. This produces a double removal of the same sins.<sup>39</sup>

But Luther does not believe John's baptism bestowed forgiveness by itself, and so Lenski's objection loses some of its force. However, even if we follow the exposition of the other Lutheran theologians quoted above, Jesus' Baptism still need not be considered "a double removal of sins", but rather, by His Baptism (as part of His redemptive work, completed on the Cross) Jesus accomplished the objective forgiveness of sins, which sinners receive in a subjective way when they are baptized.

This leads into one more aspect of Jesus' Baptism. Both Luther and many Lutheran theologians after him observe that by His Baptism, Jesus consecrated Baptism and gave it its cleansing nature, so that it is now a means of grace. Luther has Jesus say that the purpose of His Baptism is

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<sup>38</sup>Georg Stoeckhardt, "Weissagung und Erfüllung," Lehre und Wehre (July and August, 1884), XXX, 255.

<sup>39</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 127.

"to wash away and drown the sins of all the world, that through it all righteousness and salvation may be accomplished." So Luther declares:

Therefore baptism was instituted by God primarily for Christ's sake and then afterwards also for the sake of all men. For first he must sanctify the baptism through his own body and thereby take away the sin, in order that afterwards those who believe in him may have the forgiveness of sins. Therefore baptism is not a useless, empty thing, as the sectarians blasphemously say, but in it all righteousness is fulfilled . . . . For, says Christ, by my baptism I have accomplished it, that whoever believes in me and accepts this baptism receives the forgiveness of sins, and my Father and I and the Holy Spirit will dwell in him.<sup>40</sup>

Luther then speaks about the words of the Voice from heaven, and maintains that the Father is well pleased with the Son, for He permitted Himself to "be baptized and thus drowned sin in the water and then afterwards allowed himself to be killed upon the Cross," and, as a result, says Luther, "sin, death and damnation must needs perish and cease on account of him, and righteousness, life, and salvation break forth in their place."<sup>41</sup> The same thought is evident in the remark by Eckhardt: "Durch seine Taufe hat er die Taufe für die Menschen geweiht und alle erworbenen Güter des Heils in die Taufe gelegt."<sup>42</sup> In a similar vein, Heuer comments: "So hat er wiederum alle von ihm erworbenen Güter des Heils in die Taufe hineingelegt, so dass, wer da glaubt und getauft wird, dieser Güter auch wirklich teilhaftig wird," and he adds:

Christi Taufe ist auch ein Bild unserer Taufe. Wie bei der Taufe Jesu die enge Gemeinschaft der Personen der heiligen Dreieinigkeit zum Ausdruck kam, so ist der dreieinig Gott auch bei unserer Taufe. Wir werden getauft auf den Namen des dreieinigen Gottes und treten damit in die Gemeinschaft des dreieinigen Gottes, werden des wahren Gottes Kinder.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Luther, Luther's Works (Concordia-Mühlenberg), LI, 318.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>42</sup>Eckhardt, op. cit., p. 840.

<sup>43</sup>Heuer, op. cit., p. 43.

Returning to Luther, we find this comment:

"Denn hiermit zeigt er selbst, dass es muss ein soliges, gnadenreich Ding sein um die Taufe, weil er nicht all ein sein Wort und Amt darüber gibt, sondern auch sich selbst darein senket und steckt, und dies Wasser mit seinem eigenen heiligen Leibe berührt ja heiligt und voll Segens machet."<sup>44</sup>

In answer to the question: What good does the Baptism of Jesus do me?

Luther replies:

Du musst mit deiner Taufe in die Taufe Christi kommen, also dass Christi Taufe deine Taufe, und deine Taufe Christi Taufe, und allerdings Eine Taufe sei. Denn die Taufe ist ein solch Bad, durch welches uns unsere Sünden abgewaschen werden; . . . . Und wenn uns auch die Taufe das, nämlich Vergebung der Sünden, nicht brächte, so wäre uns die Taufe kein nütze und wäre nichts besser denn ein ander Bad. Darum sollen wir wissen und glauben, dass Christus um unsertwillen getauft sei, und also sagen: Seine Taufe sei meine und meine Taufe seine Taufe; denn er ist das Lamm Gottes, welches der Welt Sünde trägt. Und dass er nun getauft wird, das wird er in unserer Person und von unsertwegen getauft, die wir von der Welt und voller Sünden sind; welche Sünde er auf sich genommen und ist durch diese seine Taufe davon abgewaschen."<sup>45</sup>

Because of this, Luther concludes that "alle nun, die also in Christum getauft werden, dennen sollen ihre Sünden auch also abgewaschen und vergeben sein."<sup>46</sup> This means that in our Baptism we shall receive the Holy Spirit, as we see from Gerhard's statement: "As the Holy Spirit was supernaturally and peculiarly united with the dove in which he descended on Christ at his Baptism, so even at the present day is he supernaturally and peculiarly united with the water of Baptism."<sup>47</sup> Thus what happened at the Baptism of Jesus occurs at every Christian Baptism. Fuerbringer,

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<sup>44</sup> Luther, Samtliche Werke, (Erlangen) XVI, 70.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 112-13.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>47</sup> Gerhard, as quoted by H. Schmid, op. cit., p. 557.

reproducing Luther, says that heaven was not closed again after Christ's Baptism:

Nein, er ist nicht wieder zugeschlossen, sondern steht noch täglich offen, bis an den jüngsten Tag; dazumal aber ist er sichtlich offen gestanden, dass wir glauben sollen und gewiss sein, solches geschehe noch täglich, wenn wir und andere getauft werden . . .

Die Tauf' im Jordan an sich naim  
Das himmelische Gotteslamm,  
Dadurch, der nie kein' Sünde tat,  
Von Sünden uns gewaschen hat.<sup>48</sup>

What blessings come to us through our Baptism because Jesus Himself was baptized may be seen in this remark by Ylvisaker<sup>1</sup>:

His baptism was important not only for Himself, but also to us. And His baptism is not merely a symbol of the blessing in our baptism but it is also the source of the blessing it contains. It is because Jesus was baptized with His baptism that the blessing may be ours. Because Jesus was baptized for our salvation, we are baptized unto salvation in His name. Because He received the Spirit, He confers the Spirit upon us. Because He was and continued to be God's beloved Son, we become in Him the beloved children of God (Essendrop).<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion, Ylvisaker refers to Chrysostom and declares that Jesus

personally was in no need of baptism for His own salvation, but baptism was in need of the power of Christ; for baptism was to become the source and the essence of all blessings in order that they who are baptized might be considered worthy to receive the Holy Ghost.<sup>50</sup>

Some theologians might not agree with the thought that baptism was "to become" the source of all blessings. Our rejoinder would be that because Jesus was baptized, in our place, He consecrated the water of Baptism and now through this sacrament gives us forgiveness and salvation.

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<sup>48</sup> Ludwig Fuerbringer, "Christi Taufe und unsere Taufe," Der Lutheraner, LXVII, 18.

<sup>49</sup> Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' BAPTISM FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

In the preceding chapters, we have endeavored to present an exegetical study of the Baptism of Jesus, review some of the more prominent interpretations concerning it, consider what the Baptism meant for Jesus Himself, and what significance it has in relation to His entire work of redemption. The previous chapter has also already called attention to some aspects of both the importance and the meaning of the Baptism of Jesus for the Church of our day and age. The purpose of this chapter is to expand that consideration.

#### The Significance of Jesus' Baptism for Christians Today

If it is true that by His Baptism, Jesus consecrated the water of Baptism and imparted to the Sacrament of Baptism the blessings of God's grace, then surely His Baptism is very important for Christians today. We may not always fully appreciate this significance, but we should know that the Baptism of Jesus was held in high esteem in the early Christian Church, for Knox informs us that "it came near to inclusion in the Creed"<sup>1</sup> One reason why it is so important is brought to our attention by Lampe in his remark "the expected and general outpouring of the Spirit was anticipated and prefigured in the baptism of the Messiah at John's hands."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>L. L. Knox, St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles (Cambridge: University Press, 1939), p. 157 n.2.

<sup>2</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, "Baptism in the New Testament," The Scottish Journal of Theology (June, 1952), V, 166.

According to the findings of the Interim Report, we must keep in mind the Baptism of Jesus if we wish to understand His command to us to go and baptize:

The commission of the Risen Lord has to be seen in its dimension of depth in what He has done for us, and for our example, in His life and work on earth. Christian baptism looks back to Christ's Baptism in the Jordan "to fulfill all righteousness" and to the fulfillment of that Baptism on the Cross.<sup>3</sup>

Because of this, "the doctrine of Baptism is grounded in the Person and Work of Christ. What He was, what He taught, and what He did are the facts that determine and shape the Sacrament of Baptism and give it its significance."<sup>4</sup>

The significance of the Baptism of Jesus is basic, therefore, to our awareness of the significance of our own baptism. The comment of Robert Law on I John 5:6 helps us to see this:

The Apostle's words may suggest the question whether the worth of the Sacraments as permanent and, one might also say, living witnesses to the historic reality, as well as to the ideal significance, of the facts they represent, is usually appreciated and emphasized as it ought to be. His declaration that Christ came by water, though not by water only, gives to Christ's own baptism an importance that is not always recognized.<sup>5</sup>

The submission of Jesus to Baptism is regarded by Klingelhoefer as important evidence from Scripture for the God-ordained use of Baptism for man's salvation. He declares:

Dass auch Jesus selbst sich unter das Zeichen der Wassertaufe Johannes des Täufers stellte und sich solcherweise in die Niedrigkeit unseres sündigen Menschseins und der Gehorsamspflicht gegen seinen himmlischen Vater einordnete, ist wohl der stärkste neutestamentliche Be-

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<sup>3</sup>Church of Scotland, Special Commission on Baptism, Interim Report Of The Special Commission On Baptism (Edinburgh: Blackwell, 1955), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Law, The Tests of Life (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), p. 121.

weis für die schriftgemäße und gottgewollte Ordnung der Wassertaufe im Heilserleben des sündigen Menschen.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, even the answer of Jesus "to fulfill all righteousness" is basic, according to Klingelhoefer, for our understanding the importance of the Baptism of Jesus for us. He writes:

Der Herr Jesus war sich seiner göttlichen Sendung auch ohne sinnenfällige Zeichen klar bewusst. Wir Menschen aber bedürfen des von Gott geschenkten und dadurch geheiligten Zeichens, weil anders unser Glaube nicht die nötige Vorstellungskraft gewinnen kann, sich des Heilserlebens mit Jesus Christus greifbar klar bewusst zu werden. So sollte also durch die Unterordnung Jesus unter die Johannestaufe, die ja öffentlich im Jordan geschah, uns Menschen eine deutliche Vorstellung von dem gegeben werden, was im Rat des Höchsten vor Grundlegung der Welt und nun auch im Herzen Jesu beschlossen war, nämlich, dass er in die Welt gekommen war, um als das fehllose, wahrhaftige Gotteslamm sich unter das göttliche Todesurteil über die Sünder aller Welt zu stellen und durch sein stellvertretendes Todesleiden den Sündern eine ewige vollgültige Erlösung zu schaffen.

From the foregoing comments, we wonder how or when we failed to recognize the importance of Christ's Baptism. But we are compelled to confess that somehow we have missed it to a great extent, and we believe that the Baptism of Jesus does not receive the attention that it should in the Church today.

Among recent theologians to lay new stress on the Baptism of Jesus, Oscar Cullmann stands out as one who interprets His Baptism as being extremely important. Cullmann believes that the Baptism of Jesus plays an integral part in His redemptive work of effecting a "general forgiveness" for all men. He maintains that the Baptism of Jesus points to the Cross.

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<sup>6</sup>Klingelhoefer, Die Neue Testamentliche Taufe (Witten: Ruhr: Bundes Verlag, 1952), p. 19.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

in which alone all Baptism finds its fulfilment. Thus Gullmann reaches this conclusion:

It is he, Jesus, who will not only baptise individual men with water like John the Baptist but will complete the general Baptism, for all men, and once for all, at the moment of [ ] his atoning death. It belongs to the essence of this general Baptism effected by Jesus, that it is offered in entire independence of the decision of faith and understanding of those who benefit from it. Baptismal grace has its foundation here, and it is in the strictest sense "prevenient grace."<sup>8</sup>

In the light of this we can better appreciate Gullmann's earlier statement that "Christian Baptism, when regarded as Baptism for the forgiveness of sins is no mere reversion to Johannine baptism. It is rather the fulfilment, which became possible only through the completed work of Jesus on the Cross."<sup>9</sup> Gullmann later expounds his view of Christ's work as a general Baptism, completed in His death and resurrection:

According to the New Testament, all men have in principle received Baptism long ago, namely on Golgotha, at Good Friday and Easter. There the essential act of Baptism was carried out, entirely without our co-operation, and even without our faith. There the whole world was baptised on the ground of the absolutely sovereign act of God, who in Christ "first loved us" (I John 4:19) before we loved him, even before we believed.<sup>10</sup>

That the Baptism of Jesus by John is very important can be gathered from Gullmann's observation that

individual participation in the death and resurrection of Christ in Baptism is possible only after Christ has completed his general Baptism; and this is the reason why he himself was baptised by John, and why those received into the Church today are baptised.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Oscar Gullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid, (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 19-20.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

Nor does Cullmann stand alone in this interpretation. A similar view is expressed by Robinson:

Behind Christian baptism stands the baptism, unique and all inclusive, undertaken by Jesus Himself for the sins of the whole world. Indeed, the fundamental reason why baptism "makes one" is that it brings men under a baptism "once made." The one baptism is that by which the Church is created, before it is that which the Church administers.<sup>12</sup>

Then, speaking of Cullmann's generalization of the work of Christ as a "single, prevenient and all-inclusive baptism" Robinson says:

I believe that Cullmann is right. I believe that it can be shown (a) that such a conception, though attaching itself pre-eminently and naturally to the death of Christ, is used to interpret His whole work from His baptism in Jordan to the final release of the Spirit at Pentecost; and (b) that such an understanding is to be traced in every important literary tradition in the New Testament.<sup>13</sup>

We may not agree with his expression "every important literary tradition in the New Testament", but this should not detract from his first observation. The Interim Report also seems to support the view held by Cullmann:

the BAPTISMA of which the New Testament speaks is the One Baptism of vicarious sacrifice on the Cross. That is the mighty event for which [ ] Jesus Christ was born, and for which He was consecrated and sealed at the Jordan. By the pouring out of His Spirit He gives those baptized into Him to share in His One vicarious Baptism . . . . Primarily, BAPTISMA refers to the Baptism of Blood on the cross on our behalf, but it also refers to the Sacrament of that Baptism in which all who at Christ's command are baptized in water into His name and rise with Him into newness of life. In the New Testament the Sacrament of Baptism and the vicarious Baptism of Christ are spoken of so indivisibly that it is impossible to distinguish what has been done for us by the Cross and resurrection and what by the Sacrament of that Baptism. It is that union or inseparable relation which is the very meaning of the Sacrament in which we are baptized with Christ's Baptism.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, "One Baptism as a Category of New Testament Soteriology," Scottish Journal of Theology, VI, (September, 1963), 257.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., pp. 9-10.

The Interim Report proceeds with its review of "One Baptism" by stating:

We must speak of the One Baptism as two-fold: the Baptism of Blood on the Cross and the Baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost. Through the latter the Church is incorporated into Christ and given to share in His One Baptism. The Baptism for all men is realized in the Church through the Baptism of the Spirit, but this Baptism of the Church is for all men in the sense that at Pentecost the Church is commissioned and consecrated to take the Gospel to all creatures. In that sense the Pentecostal Baptism corresponds to Christ's own Baptism in the Jordan, where He was consecrated to the mission of the Cross.<sup>15</sup>

A similar view is presented by Vogel, who describes baptism as the new beginning which God makes with the sinner, and which involves divine sonship and incorporation into the body of Christ:

the quality of this institutio is determined by the fact that the instituting Lord Himself underwent a baptism which alone made it possible for us to be baptized at all into and in Him, and which is the basis of the reality and truth of our baptism.<sup>16</sup>

Another thought related to the above is presented by Lampe, who believes that Christian Baptism means reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. He asserts that

Christian Baptism is the application to each believer of the Baptism of Christ as it was consummated and fulfilled in His death and resurrection. The Christian who has sacramentally died and risen with Christ to the new life in the Spirit is "anointed in the Messiah" upon whom the "unction" of the Spirit came, and through whom the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost to make his followers *Χριστοί*.<sup>17</sup>

Lampe regards the Baptism of John as an act of prophetic symbolism, not as an efficacious sacrament for the forgiveness of sins, but he says

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> H. Vogel, "The First Sacrament: Baptism," Scottish Journal of Theology, (March, 1954), VII, 33.

<sup>17</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, The Seal of the Spirit (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1951), p. 6.

The great event which changed Johannine into Christian Baptism was . . . the Baptism of Jesus regarded first, as the Synoptists and the Fourth Gospel both imply, as the foreshadowing and symbolical summing up of His mission as Son and Servant of God, of His death, resurrection, and ascension and of the New Covenant to be inaugurated in these events, and, secondly, as an event which prefigured and made possible the Pentecostal fulfilment, of the ancient hope of a universal outpouring of the Spirit upon the people of God.<sup>18</sup>

Lampe agrees that not only the Baptism of Jesus at the Jordan, but also His Baptism on the Cross makes possible the bestowal of the Spirit, and he notes that during the earthly ministry of Jesus

the general outpouring of the Spirit remains an unfulfilled promise reserved for the future . . . before the saving work of Jesus was completed, He "spoke of the Spirit which they that believed on Him were to receive" (John 7:39) . . . so far as Christ's followers were concerned, therefore, it was the completed *βαπτισμα* of His death, and not merely His Baptism in the Jordan, which enabled them to receive the "Holy Spirit of promise."<sup>19</sup>

The Interim Report stands in accord with this:

The Christian rite of Baptism goes back in origin to the Baptism of Jesus in water and Spirit at the Jordan, where water-Baptism and Spirit Baptism were joined together in a unity, therefore determining the nature of Christian Baptism. "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5). That is the way in which Jesus in the Fourth Gospel speaks of Baptism. In Him John's Baptism has been fulfilled and become Christian Baptism, bringing through the Spirit the new birth into the Kingdom of God. Because His hour is not yet come, the hour of crucifixion and glorification, the Spirit is not poured out, so that sharing by others in His Baptism waits until the resurrection and Pentecost for its fulfilment.<sup>20</sup>

Discussing the difference between the Johannine Baptism of the apostles and the Christian Baptism of converts, Lampe says:

The Johannine rite received a new meaning as soon as the Apostles

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>20</sup>Op. cit., p. 9.

had experienced the coming of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit had descended upon them immediately; but the case of their converts was different. They had to be brought to faith in Jesus as the Christ by the apostolic ministry of witness and preaching of the word, and their union with Christ, attained by faith, is sacramentally mediated to them by Baptism. The Baptism of Jesus, as the Servant who makes atonement for His people, having been completed in His death and resurrection, those who accept Him as the Christ are baptized in the name of Jesus the Anointed for the remission of sins. By undergoing Baptism the new converts come to belong to the Christ; they are made His property, entered in the name of the Messiah as members of His people; and through their participation in the Anointed they receive a share in His anointing, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the sign that the Messianic age has already dawned.<sup>21</sup>

Still another interesting facet of the significance of the Baptism of Jesus for Christians today is the relation it has to an early Christian practice which Lampe calls a "sealing." Referring to the phrases  $\epsilon\upsilon\ \tau\tilde{\omega}\ \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}$ ,  $\epsilon\upsilon\ \tilde{\omega}$  (Eph. 1:12-13)  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}\nu$  (II Corinthians 1:21) and  $\epsilon\upsilon\ \tilde{\omega}$  (Eph. 4:30), Lampe suggests that these are statements regarding spiritual anointing, and that

the only rite which is here contemplated is the Baptism which the Church derived in its earliest days from John and which had been transformed in its significance by the baptism, death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

Referring to the ancient custom of "chrismation" and consignation with the sign of the Cross, Lampe maintains that

this edifying practice signified by the visible sign one aspect of what had been sacramentally effected in Baptism. It translated into dramatic form the New Testament teaching that in Baptism the believer is made a member of Christ and a sharer in His Messianic character so that the Church can be described in later times by Theophilus of Antioch as the "anointed people".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Lampe, op. cit., pp. 51-2.

<sup>22</sup>Lampe, The Seal of the Spirit, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 308.



Near the end of his book, Lampe says that among some second-century Fathers the connection of this spiritual sealing and the sacrament of Baptism had become so close that the seal and the rite were regarded as identical:

The seal was received by the believer in Baptism because his Baptism re-enacted Christ's own Baptism, so that he was enabled to participate symbolically in the spirit's descent at the Jordan, and, through the mediation of the son of God, to hear, as it were, the divine declaration of his own adoptive sonship.<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion, Lampe says:

Union with Christ and sharing in His Sonship (so far as that is possible for those who receive it by grace and not by nature) is symbolized and sacramentally effected by Baptism which re-enacts the Baptism of Jesus in which the Spirit descended upon Him, and He was proclaimed the Son of the divine Father.<sup>25</sup>

The significance of Jesus' Baptism for the Church today receives a somewhat different interpretation from Karl Barth, but he considers it of great importance for a proper understanding of Christian Baptism. He describes Christian Baptism as being in essence

the representation (Abbild) of a man's renewal through his participation by means of the power of the Holy Spirit in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and therewith the representation of man's association with Christ, with the covenant of grace which is concluded and realized in Him, and with the fellowship of His Church.<sup>26</sup>

What he means by representation (Abbild) he explains in this way:

According to John 1, the water baptism of John witnesses to the baptism of the Spirit which is to be directly accomplished by Jesus Christ Himself. According to the foundation passage Romans 6:5, it is the *ὁμοίωμα* (likeness) of His death. Therefore and in this sense we call baptism a representation.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Barth, The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, translated by Ernest A. Payne (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

Barth connects the Baptism of Jesus with Christian Baptism when he says

As Luther . . . and Calvin also believed, it is the Lord who makes water baptism powerful for repentance and the forgiveness of sins. He, who needed not these things, submitted to them, thereby setting forth both what happened on Golgotha and also what happened on Easter morning, thus declaring His solidarity with sinners. Baptism was thereby made a living and expressive representation of Christ's high-priestly death and resurrection. Whoever now is baptized may expect like Him to see the heavens opened, to hear the voice of the Father, and to share in the Holy Spirit.<sup>28</sup>

According to Barth, Jesus is now "the Chief Character, the primary and true Baptizer," who turned Baptism into "something powerful, living, and expressive," and who, by His own "participation in it, gave command and commission. Therein lies the potency of baptism."<sup>29</sup> Therefore Barth considers the Baptism of Jesus as the true origin of Baptism. He says:

The covenant of grace was to be established through Christ's death and revealed in His resurrection. By thus putting Himself already into the representation that prefigured these things (and afterwards into their mirroring), Jesus Christ "instituted" (eingesetzt) baptism. All the other passages which occur to one at this point -- for example, Matt. 28:19 -- are to be understood as the ratification and enforcement of the actual "institution" of baptism. By this testimony to the service He was to render -- by this witnessing to Himself as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 and the Lamb of God who bears the sins of the world (John 1:29f. of Mark 10:33, Luke 12:50) -- Christ made Himself Lord of baptism.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the Baptism of Jesus has significance for the Church today in that, as some of the above references imply, those who receive Christian Baptism receive with it the title "Sons of God" and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that we are sons of God in the same way that Jesus was and is. His Sonship is the eternal, divine Sonship. Ours

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

is an adoption into God's family. But it is through Baptism that this adoption takes place. Lampe explains this in the comment:

When the completion of the work of Christ made it possible for believers to be baptised in His name, their baptism corresponded to His own, except in that it was for remission of sins. As the latter prefigured Christ's death, so the former looks back to it and applies its efficacy to the convert who mystically participates in it; as the latter was the moment of the declaration of sonship, so the former is the moment of entry into the status of adoptive sonship; as the latter took place at a baptism of "all the people" (Luke 3:21), so the former is a sacrament of incorporation into the new people of the Messiah; and as sonship and the gift of the Spirit are inseparably connected in Christ's baptism, so they are in Christian baptism . . . the gift of the Spirit cannot be disassociated from the rite in which Christ's death and resurrection are made present and the believer is incorporated into him.<sup>31</sup>

Flemington calls attention to the importance that the Baptism of Jesus has as the antecedent of Christian Baptism, through which believers receive the Spirit and are called sons of God, saying that "it can hardly be accidental that one, or both of these two -- possession by the Spirit and the status of being sons of God -- are connected closely with the rite of Christian baptism in several passages in Acts and in the Epistles."<sup>32</sup> The Interim Report also lists numerous New Testament passages (e.g., John 14:26; Acts 2:32f; I Peter 1:2; Rom. 1:1f.; Eph. 1:17; 4:4-6; II Thes. 2:13f.; and Rom. 8:1f.) and then makes this observation:

Most of them have a reference to Baptism, and speak of God as acting upon us by His Spirit in Christ in whom we are given the Spirit of Sonship. That teaching would appear to go back to the Baptism of Jesus Christ in the Jordan, where the Word of the Father is heard addressing Him as the Son . . . and where the Spirit of God descends upon Him sealing Him as the Son sent by the Father . . . . Thus the commission by the Risen Christ, to baptise in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, carries a reference back to Christ's own Baptism in the Jordan. Christ Himself had promised that the Father would send the Spirit in the name of (ΕΝΟΜΟΙΑΤΙ) the Son (John 14:26). After the Baptism of Christ that is the norm of all Baptism,

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<sup>31</sup>Lampe, "Baptisma in the New Testament," pp. 168-69.

<sup>32</sup>W. F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London: S. P. C. K., 1953), p. 29.

so that Baptism into Christ is also Baptism which involves the coming of the Spirit from the Father in the name of the Son.<sup>33</sup>

Robinson also relates our position as sons of God to the Baptism of Jesus when he declares that in Eph. 1:5-6, "our 'adoption as sons through Jesus Christ' is associated with the grace 'freely bestowed on us in the Beloved,'" and he suggests that "the choice of this title for Christ (found only here in the Pauline writings) may again indicate that the ground of our sonship rests in the baptism of Jesus." He looks at it this way:

The association at the baptism of Jesus of the gift of the Spirit with the declaration of Sonship is the ground of the connexion between Christian baptism, the Spirit, and our adoption as sons (Gal. 3:26-4:7; cf. Rom. 8:14-16) . . . Christian baptism simply reproduces in the life of the Christian the one baptism of Jesus begun in Jordan and completed in the Resurrection.<sup>34</sup>

In supplying the above references, we did not mean to imply in every case that the interpretation of the respective sources is in complete accord with the Lutheran doctrine. Nor did we mean to suggest that where there is a difference, we should adopt a new interpretation. But we have attempted to summarize some of the inferences which may be drawn from the Baptism of Jesus, and wish to state that in our opinion the Baptism of Jesus and its significance in our Christian life and in the teaching of the Church deserves far more attention than we have given it.

#### The Significance of the Baptism in Other New Testament Passages

Perhaps some would say that the Baptism of Jesus has not received

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<sup>33</sup> Op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Robinson, op. cit., pp. 262-63.

much emphasis in the New Testament, although Peter refers to it in Acts 1:21 and 10:38. We believe, however, that several other passages contain at least an indirect reference to the Baptism of Jesus, and that these passages also emphasize the significance which the Baptism of Jesus should have for us today. We believe that such passages as Phil. 2:6-9, Gal. 4:4, and Heb. 5:5-8; 7:28 and 10:9 help us to understand why Jesus was baptized, and how His Baptism is related to His entire redemptive work, with its climax in the "Baptism" on the Cross.

According to Voorhis, "by submission to John's baptism Jesus thus symbolically declared His acceptance (humanly speaking) of that vicarious principle upon which, according to the New Testament, His ministry and death actually rested."<sup>35</sup> John Gibson contrasts the approach of Jesus to John's Baptism with the approach of other people:

By baptism John opened the door of the new Kingdom. From the wilderness of sin the people entered it as subjects; from the seclusion of private life Jesus entered it as King and Priest. They came under a vow of obedience unto Him; He came under a vow of obedience unto death, even the death of the Cross.<sup>36</sup>

In the early apostolic preaching, the birth, infancy, childhood of Jesus and His years of obscurity received little attention, and so, according to Bouman, "the event at the Jordan when Jesus was baptized formed the starting point of apostolic preaching, as the decisive turning point of His career."<sup>37</sup> It shows us the willingness of Jesus to conform to and

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<sup>35</sup>John W. Voorhis, "The Baptism of Jesus and His Sinlessness," The Evangelical Quarterly, VII, (1935), 43.

<sup>36</sup>John Munre Gibson, The Gospel of St. Matthew (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1896), p. 35.

<sup>37</sup>Herbert Bouman, "The Baptism of Christ with Special Reference to the Gift of the Spirit." Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVIII, 3.

to follow the will of His Father, "to fulfill all righteousness," and therefore Bouman concludes:

All that our incarnate Lord did was an act of total obedience to the Father's will. So Christ made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and humbled Himself, and became obedient, yea, obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Christ's submission to John's baptism meant for Him, therefore, the performance of a necessary part of His redemptive work, a part of His active obedience, which included the dutiful submission to all that God asked of man.<sup>38</sup>

To this, Bouman adds an interesting foot-note, which reads in part:

In the words "obedience" and "submission" is expressed the double aspect of our Lord's total obedience. All of it was "active" in the sense of a conscious, willing performance of the duties the Father gave Him; all of it was "passive" in the sense of the meek, nonresisting surrender of the Son to the Father's direction.<sup>39</sup>

The passage which immediately comes to mind, and to which Bouman and Gibson allude, is Phil. 2:6-9.

Is it going too far to propose that St. Paul had in mind the Baptism of Jesus when he wrote that Christ "took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"? If there is an allusion here to the Baptism of Jesus, then also the next verse may hint at Christian Baptism as it is applied to mankind. "That every knee should bow" and that "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" could possibly be a reflection of part of the formula used at the baptism of Christians in the early Church. We realize

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

that the passage speaks of the exaltation of Christ as Lord over all creation and admit that the Baptism could not be applied to "things in heaven" and to "things under the earth". But we ask nevertheless: Would it be wrong to see here a reference to Christian baptism, as an evidence of the importance it holds in Christian faith? And would it be wrong to give praise to Christ as Lord, who once was baptized as a man, and thus publicly began His work as the Servant of God? We think not. We believe that here this is a reference (indirect at least, if not direct) to the Baptism of Jesus, and to the significance which His Baptism has for us.

One objection which might be raised to this view is the consideration that in Phil. 2:7 St. Paul uses the word *δούλος* for "servant" rather than *παῖς*. The latter would be a parallel to the words spoken by the heavenly Voice at the Baptism of Jesus. But we believe we may safely disregard that objection. For one thing, there appears to be a parallel here to what happened when Jesus came to be baptized. We may distinguish the incarnation as the beginning of His humiliation from His baptism, where He publicly and voluntarily indicated His readiness to obey the will of the Father. Lenski translates the clause *ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος* "when he got to be in men's likeness", and he renders *μορφὴν δούλου λαβών* with "he took a slave's form." He comments: "The (former) clause is temporal. Paul clearly distinguishes 'got to be in men's likeness' (the incarnation) from 'took a slave's form' (the humiliation). Both are simultaneous, but the two are not identical."<sup>40</sup> Yet even though the humiliation is simultaneous with the incarnation, this does not nec-

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<sup>40</sup>R. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians (Columbus, Wartburg Press, 1957), p. 780.

essarily mean that all phases of the humiliation are simultaneous, and therefore we believe that this passage has specific meaning in the light of Jesus' Baptism. As we have seen, at His Baptism Jesus publicly entered His Messianic ministry. The relation of this passage to that fact lies in His taking the form of a servant or slave. Although Lenski does not refer to the Baptism, he does say: "When Christ Jesus became man he took a slave's form . . . in order to fulfill his office on earth"<sup>41</sup> (our emphasis). We find that Lenski's comment on *δούλος* is also very helpful. Discussing the humiliation, or, as he puts it the "lowering" of Christ, he comments:

This lowering was 'in that he got to be obedient' down to a point so extreme that it goes even far beyond the miracle of his assuming our human nature. Here we see the connotation of the word *δούλος* "slave"; it is in the adjective "obedient". Yet the idea of a forced obedience is removed already by "he lowered himself", this is voluntary obedience. Isaiah who pictures the Messiah as the great 'Ebed Yahweh', pictures also his death as that of a slaughtered sheep; but the LXX carefully rendered this Hebrew word, not with *doulos*, but with *πάλλης*, 'servant', which the apostles retain when quoting the prophet. May we say that God did not make Christ a slave but that Christ Himself did that? A slave's mark is obedience to the extent of not following his own will. This strong word is here used in paradoxical fashion: by his own will Christ gave up his will by the act of voluntariness in descending to the cross. 'Slave' matches 'cross' for when slaves were executed they were crucified. For this reason 'slave' is here used and not 'servant'.<sup>42</sup>

But even more significant for our suggestion is the commentary which A. B. Bruce gives us in the preface of his book, The Humiliation of Christ. Bruce refers to the views propounded on Phil. 2:5-11 in Resch's Agrapha, and declares:

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 781.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 784.



The views I refer to occur in the excursus on the Syrian Baptismal Liturgy of Severus, in connection with a group of apocryphal sayings concerning Christ's baptism (Agrapha Apokryphon 5, pp. 357-372). To this Liturgy Resche attaches considerable importance, as, although of late date (sixth century) and containing apocryphal elements, also preserving some fragments of the original evangelic tradition, as embodied in the Urevangelium, the Logia of Matthew, the no longer existing source of much of the material preserved in the Synoptic Gospels. Among the genuine elements he reckons certain words ascribed to the Baptist in the narrative of the baptism of Jesus given in the Liturgy. In the Latin version of the edition of the Liturgy (Fabricius Boderianus, Antwerp, 1572) the passage is as follows: At ille dixit: Fieri non potest ut rapinam assumam, expressing the reluctance of the Baptist to administer the rite to Jesus. The important word, it will be seen at once, is rapinam. It recalls the ἄπαργυρός of Phil. 2:6. The two words, or the idea they express, are supposed to come from one source, the record of the baptism given in the Logia of the Apostle Matthew.<sup>43</sup>

In reviewing this almost fantastic possibility, Bruce continues:

According to Resche, St. Paul knew the Logia, and has made frequent quotations from it in his Epistles, especially in the Epistle to the Ephesians. This is an important position if it can be established, and the evidence adduced by the author of Agrapha deserves careful consideration. In particular, Resche is of the opinion that in Phil. 2:6-11 the apostle gives a summary view of the life of Jesus from His baptism in the Jordan to the ascension, based on the account in the Urevangelium, and that he is especially indebted to that source for the remarkable idea expressed by the word ἄπαργυρός. The hypothesis is that the Baptist first employed such a word to express his sense of the incongruity involved in baptizing Jesus; -- it would be robbing Jesus of the glory with which by the descent of the Spirit and the transfiguration of His body (conceived to have preceded the baptism) He had been invested. Then St. Paul, having the events at the baptism in view, as reported in the primitive Gospel, transferred the idea to Christ Himself in this sense: while aware that the phenomena connected with the baptism and preceding it, the descent of the Spirit and the light radiating from His transfigured person signified that He was "equal to God" -- divine, nevertheless He was resolved to accomplish His work not in the "form of God," but in the "form of a servant," and therefore at the beginning was baptized, and at the end crucified. And as long as the Baptist's word about the rapina was remembered, the apostle's word about the ἄπαργυρός was understood. But when the original Gospel disappeared,

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<sup>43</sup>Alexander Balmain Bruce, "Preface to the Fourth Edition", The Humiliation of Christ (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, fifth edition, 1900), p. vii.

the true exegesis of Phil. 2:6 was lost, and "in place of a vivid conception of the historical Christ and His first entrance on public life at the Jordan, a sickly kenotic established itself on an ungrammatical foisting of the *λογος κενωκος* as subject of the passage, and a dogmatizing exegesis wandered even further from the original sense."<sup>44</sup>

Druce does not feel, however, that the view proposed by Resche is acceptable, although he concedes that "the restriction of the sphere of Christ's self-humiliation to His public ministry on earth, beginning with His baptism, one can understand. One can even imagine the Apostle Paul . . . confining his presentation of the theme within these limits."<sup>45</sup> But then he sets forth his own view, in opposition to Resch, and says: "I believe that St. Paul extends the self-humiliation of Christ into the pre-earthly state, and regards His being born into this world as the first act in the sublime drama."<sup>46</sup> We agree that the self-humiliation of the Son of God does extend into His incarnation, but to extend it to "the pre-earthly state" would seem to suggest the humiliation of the divine nature also, and that we cannot approve. We suggest that St. Paul is thinking of the Baptism, and refers to it at least indirectly when he says that Jesus "Humbled Himself and became obedient unto death."

We furthermore believe that our suggestion has merit because of the words *μωρην δουλου λαβων* and the relationship of *δουλος* to the term *παῖς Θεου*. We see this relationship more clearly in the light of the comments by Jeremias. After citing certain passages in Acts (3:13,26; 4:27, 30) where the term *παῖς Θεου* is used as a title of Jesus, Jeremias contends

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. viii.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. x.

that this term has a very ancient origin. He adds: "It may be presumed that the description of Jesus as *παῖς Θεοῦ* lies behind yet other New Testament passages."<sup>47</sup> He then demonstrates in some detail that in Mark 1:11 and parallels the term *παῖς Θεοῦ* is a title of Jesus. He writes:

The hypothesis that the voice at the baptism was originally purely an echo of Isa. 42:1 is supported by several considerations. First, the heavenly voice, Mark 1:11, is obviously meant to explain the impartation of the Spirit (Mark 1:10) as a fulfillment of Scripture . . . . Second, when the text of the divine declaration at the baptism and the transfiguration wavers between *ἀγαπητός* (Mark 1:11 par., 9:7 par., Matt 17:6 and Luke 9:35, II Pet. 1:17) and *ἐκλεκτός* (Luke 9:35), we presumably have variations in the translation of *לְבָרֵךְ*. Is. 42:1, which is sometimes rendered by *ἐκλεκτός* (LXX, ζ and θ), sometimes by *ἀγαπητός* (Matt. 12:18). Third, in John 1:34 the heavenly voice at the baptism, according to the supposed oldest text . . . is given in the words *οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐκλεκτός τοῦ Θεοῦ*. But 'the chosen of God' is a messianic designation coming from Is. 42:1 . . . John 1:34 shows very plainly that the baptismal declaration originally must have been a consistent quotation from Is. 42:1. If that is correct, then it would be confirmed that the designation of Jesus as *παῖς Θεοῦ* belongs to a very old (pre-Markan) layer of the tradition.<sup>48</sup>

The point that Jeremias wants to establish is that the heavenly voice at the baptism of Jesus was a reference to Is. 42:1 only, and not to Ps. 2:7, where the word *υἱός* occurs, and so he adds this foot-note:

The consequences which result from this are extraordinarily far-reaching. It means not merely that the voice at Baptism has nothing to do with kingly enthronement, adoption, etc., but that there arises above all the question whether the *παῖς Θεοῦ* predication does not play an essential part in the emergence of the messianic title *ὁ υἱός τοῦ Θεοῦ* which was unknown to late Judaism.<sup>49</sup>

Discussing the possibility that as a description of Jesus, the term *παῖς*

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<sup>47</sup>J. Jeremias and W. Zimmerli, The Servant of God (Naperville, Ill.: A. R. Allenson, Inc., 1957), p. 80.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-82.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

θεοῦ means originally 'servant of God' and not 'child of God', Jeremias notes that either interpretation makes the title one of honor; but to show its distinct usage when applied to Jesus, he declares:

παῖς θεοῦ, however, in the Old Testament and in late Judaism, was at no time a title of the Messiah, but occurs without exception as a messianic designation only in the form 'my servant' of divine discourse; whereas in Acts, as the possessive pronouns show ('his' -- Acts 3:13, 26; 'thy' servant -- 4:27, 30), servant of God is a title of Jesus. Thus παῖς θεοῦ as a messianic title cannot have been transferred to Jesus. In that case so much the more important are the associations of the designation of Jesus as παῖς θεοῦ with Deut. Is., to be found not merely in the form of quotation, but also of reference, (here he includes Phil. 2:6-11).<sup>50</sup>

On the relation of Phil. 2:6-11 to Is. 53, Jeremias says:

The connection . . . becomes plain as soon as it is recognized that not the LXX but the Hebrew text of Is. 53 is used; even the use of δοῦλος (instead of παῖς) loses its strangeness when it is recognized that we have here a direct rendering of the Hebrew (Is. 52:13). The decisive proof of the connexion of Phil. 2:6-11 with Is. 53 lies in the fact that the expression ἐκτιθέναι (Phil. 2:7), attested nowhere else in the Greek and grammatically extremely harsh, is an exact rendering of יָשַׁתְּ . . . יָשַׁתְּ (Is. 53:12). Apart from other verbal echoes, allusion to Is. 53 is to be seen further in the antithesis of extreme meekness and exaltation, in the willingness to be humbled and in the mention of obedience and of death.<sup>51</sup>

He also supplies an important foot-note here to explain ἐκτίθειν, in which he says: "יָשַׁתְּ means to 'expose', 'to pour out', 'empty', κενόω 'to drain the dregs', 'to pour out generously'. The use of Is. 53:12 shows that the expression implies the surrender of life, not the kenosis of the incarnation."<sup>52</sup> To "surrender life" means, of course, to die. But when we recall that the Baptism of Jesus pointed forward to His Baptism on the Cross, we again feel that here, too, we have reason to

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

suggest that the Philippians' passage refers to His Baptism, where He gave public testimony that He was surrendering His life to the will of God.

We note also the conclusion of Robinson, who sees a definite link between Phil. 2 and Is. 53. He calls attention to various features which seem parallel in both passages, and then climaxes his remarks with this statement:

The most remarkable parallel is one that has not apparently been recognized, because it does not lie on the surface. Paul has used a very peculiar phrase to express the voluntary acceptance of humiliation by Christ, viz., "he emptied himself," and then, after three participial clauses . . . the phrase is either paralleled or continued in a more familiar one, "he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death." In the Hebrew text of Is. 53:12, we find the very phrase Paul here used, "He emptied himself to death," and "He let himself be humbled." This would suggest that Paul was not thinking primarily of the Incarnation, but of the Crucifixion, which is much more characteristic of his general thought and that the participial clauses which refer to the human life were inserted (in the Apostle's parenthetical way) to bridge the gap between the pre-existent state of glory and the humiliation of the Cross. Jesus, in fact, became the Servant of God on earth in order to empty out Himself to death, and the Kenosis was properly that of the Crucifixion, though naturally involving the Incarnation.<sup>53</sup>

And to that we add: and involving very specifically His Baptism!

If our suggestion is acceptable, then is it not likely also that the New Testament may contain other passages which at least implicitly allude to the Baptism of Jesus? Another passage which comes to mind is Gal. 4: 4-5 which reads: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so we might receive adoption as sons." The significant phrase here is "born under the Law" (*γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμου*). Although the

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<sup>53</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, The Cross in the Old Testament (London: SCM Press, 1985), pp. 104-5.

Incarnation implies that as Man, Jesus was subject to the Law, we recall His willingness at His baptism to "fulfill all righteousness." We therefore ask: Could not also this passage in Gal. be a veiled reference to that willingness? The question seems very appropriate here in view of the context, which is loaded with baptismal references. We are told in 3:27 that "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." In Gal. 4:6 we read, "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts." We believe this applies the same results to our baptism as resulted in the case of the Baptism of Jesus: the sending of the Spirit and the title of sonship. In our case, of course, sonship is one of adoption. But we feel that this parallel between the Baptism of Jesus and our own is important as evidence for the significance of His Baptism for us. It is unfortunate that in Gal. 3:26, the King James version translates "Ye are all the 'children of God'", thus missing the point of sonship there expressed by the Greek, which reads: *πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ Θεοῦ ἐστέ*. Therefore also this passage in Galatians may be loaded with far more meaning than many have realized. We feel that Bouman also gives us reason for suggesting an indirect reference to the Baptism here when he writes:

We must remember that, especially in the prophecies of Isaiah, the Messiah is pictured as the Servant of Jehovah . . . . This implies a conscious and complete submission. The Father sent forth His Son (Gal. 4:4, *ἐξαπέστειλεν* like an apostle) on a specific mission. And the Son, in complete harmony of purpose with the Father, accepted the assignment . . . . All the facts of the incarnation and humiliation are involved with this mission and total submission.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Bouman, op. cit., p. 5.

Another statement by St. Paul which may include an allusion to the Baptism of Jesus, as we see it, is in Rom. 8:3-4, where we read that "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us." Here again we feel that Paul had in mind the entire mission of Christ, including His Baptism, where Jesus said: "Thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:15). The word "fulfill" *ἠνέποιον* is the same word used here, and although the rest of verse 4 seems to refer to the believer's new life of sanctification, we suggest that Rom. 8:4 may also allude to the vicarious nature of Christ's Baptism, in which He fulfilled all righteousness for us.

Finally, we suggest that Heb. 10:5-7 be considered as a possible reference to the Baptism of Jesus. The passage reads:

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin-offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then said I, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God', as it is written of me in the roll of the book."

Based on Ps. 40:7, the passage is here related to the High Priestly Office of Christ. But at what other point in the life of Jesus could we find such a specific declaration from Him that He came to do God's will as we find at His Baptism? Passages such as John 5:30, 6:38, 8:29 and the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane "not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36) may come to mind, but, certainly the public beginning of His ministry, which took place at His Baptism, seems to be echoed in these words in Hebrews. The will of God for Jesus meant, finally, as Heb. 10:10 shows, that He give His body as the one perfect sacrifice for the sin

of the world, but again, the Baptism points forward to the Cross. Speaking on this particular passage, Albert Barnes comments that the clause "to do Thy will, O God,"

expresses the amount of all that the Redeemer came to do. He came to do the will of God (1) by perfect obedience to his law, and (2) by making an atonement for sin -- becoming 'obedient unto death'. (Phil. 2:8). The latter is the principal thought here, for the apostle is showing that sacrifice and offering such as were made under the law could not put away sin, and that Christ came in contradistinction from them to make a sacrifice that would be efficacious.

We also call attention to Westcott, who says that these words "are not to be confined to the moment of the Incarnation though they found their complete fulfillment then. They apply to each manifestation of Christ in the realm of human life."<sup>56</sup> That would obviously include His Baptism.

#### Conclusion

After considering the above material, we conclude that it should be evident that the Baptism of Jesus has great significance. We believe it was important to Him, in His human nature, as He began His Messianic, redemptive work. We maintain that it should be important for us today, and regret that often it receives only little attention. We do not think it is possible to concentrate the full significance of Jesus' Baptism in capsule form, and to say in one brief sentence: "this is what it means." We believe that there are many facets to it, and that to see the full significance, one must learn to know and appreciate each facet for its

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<sup>55</sup> Albert Barnes, Notes on the Epistle to the Hebrews (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1856), p. 250.

<sup>56</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 309.



own contribution to the overall picture. Certainly the Baptism of Jesus was an act of obedience. But it was much more than that. We believe that in the heavenly Voice, there is a definite connection with the Isaianic prophecies of the Servant of God, and that at His Baptism, Jesus came and began publicly to carry out His mission as that Servant of God. And so we agree with Cullmann, that in His Baptism at the Jordan Jesus entered publicly on the way that culminated in His Baptism on the Cross, where as the Servant of the Lord and the holy Lamb of God, He gave Himself as the perfect Sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. And because He was thus baptized, and later died for us and rose again, our Baptism has vast significance for us in that it cleanses us from sin, imparts to us the Spirit of God, and conveys to us the adoption as sons of God.

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