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## The Mode of Baptism

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## The Mode of Baptism

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A striking diversity exists in the Christian Church with reference to the mode of administering the rite of Baptism. Broadly speaking, the Eastern Church baptizes by immersion, the Western Church by pouring or sprinkling.

In the Greek Orthodox Church baptism of infants or adults is by trine immersion, "which is most essential in the administration of Baptism," although in case of extreme weakness or mortal danger a child may be baptized by affusion.<sup>1)</sup> Among the other Oriental communions the manner of applying water varies. The Nestorians, for example, stand the candidate erect in water reaching to his neck and dip the head three times. The Armenians first immerse the child and then thrice pour a handful of water on its head. However, throughout the Oriental churches the basic thought of covering the entire body or parts of the body with water persists in virtually all rituals, so that we may speak of immersion as the distinctive Eastern mode of baptizing.<sup>2)</sup>

The Western Church, if we ignore for the moment the Baptists and other immersionists, considers the manner in which water is applied in the rite of Baptism an adiaphoron. The major groups employ affusion or sprinkling but do not condemn the practise of immersion. In fact, the Roman Catholic ritual provides for immersion as well as for affusion. A similar survival appears in the Anglican Prayer-book. The Prayer-book of the Protestant Episcopal Church parallels the two modes, the rubric reading: "And thus, naming it (the child) after them, he shall dip it in water discreetly or else pour water upon it, saying," etc. The Presbyterian Church ruled out immersion in 1644 but, like the Methodists, recognizes the baptism of those immersed. The Lutheran Church has

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1) Klotsche, *Christian Symbolics*, 45.

2) For detailed information cf. Warfield, *Studies in Theology*, 345.

no formularies with provisions for immersion, and while it does not consider a baptism by immersion invalid, it would hardly lend itself to this mode of baptizing because of confessional and other reasons.<sup>3)</sup>

The Baptists and the other groups insisting upon immersion<sup>4)</sup> assert that such practise is essential to the validity of Baptism. They appeal in support of their position to the significance of the Greek word βαπτίζειν and its Latin equivalents; to the circumstances in which the baptisms of the New Testament were administered; to the significance of the rite as a burial with Christ; and to the concessions of those who, while practically rejecting immersion, admit that it was practised by the apostles and the early churches.<sup>5)</sup> These groups call immersion the "New Testament mode of baptism" and until recently<sup>6)</sup> were unanimous in affirming that immersion of the believer is essential to real Christian baptism. It is the purpose of this article to show that such a position has no Scriptural foundation and that an objective study of the Scriptures and of the literary and archeological evidence leads to the conclusion that the mode of baptism is an adiaphoron.

When Christ instituted Baptism, He did not specify any particular mode to be used. The word which He employed to designate the Baptism of the New Testament was not a new word which He coined for this specific purpose, but one which was in common use and whose meaning can, therefore, be determined. Βαπτίζειν had been long in use among the Jews to express religious washings of all kinds. Thus Luke records that the Pharisee marveled that Jesus had not first washed (ἐβατίσθη) before dinner (Luke 11:38); and Mark speaks of the washings (βαπτισμούς) by the Jews of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables, Mark 7:4. These religious washings are called by the writer to the Hebrews διάφοροι βαπτισμοί (Heb. 9:10) and refer to the purifications (καθαρισμοί) of the Old Testament. They formed a part of the Ceremonial Law and included such items as the purifying of the Levites, the priests, persons and things defiled, lepers, sacred objects, etc.

While the βαπτισμοί of the Old Testament had nothing to do with the Baptism of the New Testament, the Septuagint designates the performing of one of the prescribed ceremonial ablutions as βαπτίζειν, Ecclus. 34:25,\* and the manner in which these βαπτισμοί were performed indicates the meaning which the Jews associated

3) Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, 104; Stump, *The Christian Faith*, 333.

4) The immersionist groups are listed in *Popular Symbolics*, 427.

5) Johnson's *Universal Cyclopaedia*, sub Baptists.

6) McNutt, *Polity and Practise in Baptist Churches*, 127.

\* The Septuagint is quoted according to the Stuttgart edition of A. Rahlfs.

with the word βαπτίζειν and its derivatives. Thus we read of the cleansing of the Levites, Num. 8:6, 7: "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them. And this shalt thou do unto them to cleanse them: *sprinkle* the water of expiation on them." Of the purifying of the priests Ex. 29:4, 21, states: "And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the Tabernacle of the congregation and shalt *wash* them with water. And thou shalt take of the blood that is upon the altar and of the anointing oil and *sprinkle* it upon Aaron and upon his garments." The Mosaic regulations regarding persons and things defiled specified: "Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead and purifieth not himself, defileth the Tabernacle of the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel; because the water of separation was not *sprinkled* upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him," Num. 19:13. Of the unclean tent and vessels and persons we are told, Num. 19:18, 19: "And a clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water and *sprinkle* it upon the tent and upon all the vessels and upon the persons that were there and upon him that touched a bone or one slain or one dead or a grave. And the clean person shall *sprinkle* upon the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself and wash his clothes and *bathe* himself in water, and shall be clean at even." With reference to the lepers we read, Lev. 14:7-9: "And he [the priest] shall *sprinkle* upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean." And as to the cleansing of sacred objects we note, Lev. 16:14-19, that the mercy-seat and the altar were to be purified by the *sprinkling* of blood on them and before them. These were some of the διάφοροι βαπτισμοί mentioned Heb. 9:10. They are called "divers washings" not only because they referred to divers objects, but also because they were performed in various ways. God Himself prescribed the mode to be used, and, to say the least, it is significant that the usual mode was not immersion but *sprinkling*.

The βαπτισμοί of the Old Testament did not limit the meaning of βαπτισμός to a specific mode of applying water. Neither does the word βαπτίζειν *vi vocis*. Βαπτίζειν and its root word βάπτειν are not modal verbs. They are factitive verbs and express the fact of wetting without implying or specifying the mode to be employed. This is true of βάπτειν as well as of βαπτίζειν. Dan. 4:33 we read: "The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar; and he was driven from men and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven." The Septuagint has it: καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δρόσου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ἐβάφη. Here βάπτειν evidently cannot mean to dip or immerse. It states merely the fact

that Nebuchadnezzar's body was wet. Βαπτίζειν is used in a similar manner in the Septuagint. Naeman was told by Elisha, 2 Kings 5:10: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times," etc. From v.14 we learn καὶ κατέβη Ναυμαν καὶ ἐβαπτίσατο ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ κ. τ. λ. Did Naeman immerse himself? He was told to wash (λούσαι, v.10), and he obeyed that direction. If nothing else, βαπτίζειν here is used as synonymous with λούειν, which is a generic term, signifying to wash without reference to mode. It is also significant that Jerome translates this passage "*Descendit et lavit in Iordane,*" using for ἐβαπτίσατο *lavit*, again a generic term, meaning to wash. Of Judith we are told, Judith 12:7: καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο κατὰ νύκτα εἰς τὴν φάραγγα Βαυτιλουᾶ καὶ ἐβαπτίζετο ἐν τῇ παρεμβολῇ ἐπὶ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος. Here we have a baptism which the language employed and the attending circumstances prove not to have been an immersion. Judith "baptized" or washed herself not into or in but at (ἐπὶ) a spring. She was in the military camp of Holofernes, where regard to decency would forbid her immersing herself. Finally we read Ecclus. 34:25: βαπτιζόμενος ἀπὸ νεκροῦ καὶ πάλιν ἀτόμενος αὐτοῦ, τί ὠφέλησεν ἐν τῷ λουτρῷ αὐτοῦ; The reference here is to Num. 19:20 ff., where the law relative to the ceremonial cleansing from touching the dead is recorded. The Mosaic regulations specified *sprinkling* as the most important feature of this rite of purification, so that in this passage βαπτίζειν virtually means sprinkling. We note again, as in 2 Kings 5:10, 14, that βαπτίζειν and λουτρῶν are synonymous in thought.

Turning to the New Testament, we find βαπτίζειν and its derivatives βαπτισμός, βάπτισμα, βαπτιστής used 122 times, and in every instance they refer to a ritual or religious act. Never do these words *vi vocis* imply a washing by immersion. On the contrary, in a number of passages the conception of immersion is excluded. Thus Mark 7:4: "And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the washings" (βαπτισμούς) "of cups, brazen vessels, and of tables" (κλινῶν, couches). For these ceremonial washings (καθαρισμοί) the Jews had jars of water, John 2:6. The cups and pots and brazen vessels might have been immersed, though there are no cogent reasons to assume that this was done; but to suppose that the tables, rather couches, were immersed in water is unreasonable and certainly out of question. Again, the Pharisee, Luke 11:38, marveled that Jesus did not wash (ἐβατίσθη) before eating. The parallel passage is found Matt. 15:2, where instead of βαπτίζειν, νίπνυνται τὰς χεῖρας is used as a synonym. And in Mark 7:4, where some versions have εἰ μὴ βαπτίσωνται, the reading εἰ μὴ ὑαντίσωνται also is found. The implications of these passages are that the ceremonial ablutions before meals were performed not

by immersion but by pouring or sprinkling and that βαπτίζειν does not and cannot mean immersion and immersion only. 1 Cor. 10:2 Paul writes: "All" (the fathers) "were baptized (ἐβαπτίσαντο) unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." Comments William M. Taylor: "This first recorded baptism, so far as appears, was not immersion. Sprinkled the tribes might be, as the clouds poured down water or the spray was dashed upon them by the fury of the wind; but their baptism in the sea was contemporaneous with their 'walking upon dry land in the midst of it.' It is a very small matter; but when esteemed brethren assure us that the word 'baptize' always and everywhere means immerse, it becomes important to remark that in the very earliest case in reference to which the term is applied, it very evidently can have no such significance. There was an immersion here, indeed, but it was that of the Egyptians; and no one will be very eager to follow their example."<sup>7)</sup> Thus the use of βαπτίζειν in the Septuagint and in the New Testament clearly shows that it is not a modal verb and that the Jews did not associate with this word a specific method of applying water. Hence, the statement that βαπτίζειν signifies immersion, and immersion only, and thereby establishes immersion as the New Testament mode of baptism is without Scriptural foundation.

The New Testament records of the baptisms by John the Baptist, the apostles, Philip, and Ananias do not offer sufficient data to enable us to ascertain with absolute certainty how these baptisms were administered. Yet these records do contain enough hints and implications for us to infer how several of the recorded baptisms were *not* performed. John told the multitude, Luke 3:16: "I indeed baptize you with water, but One mightier than I cometh . . .; He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." The fulfilment of these words occurred on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:17, 18. This baptism with the Spirit and with fire was performed not by immersion but by an outpouring (ἐξέχεεν, Acts 2:33) of the Spirit and by cloven tongues like as of fire that sat upon each of them. The disciples were not carried or plunged into the Spirit and into the fire, but the Spirit and the fire came to them. That this Pentecostal baptism really was the baptism predicted by John is explicitly stated by Peter, Acts 2:33: "Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He [Jesus] hath shed forth (ἐξέχεεν, cf. vv. 17, 18) this which ye now see and hear." Since, therefore, we find neither in the words of Peter nor in the occurrences on Pentecost anything that would even faintly suggest

7) Taylor, *Moses the Lawgiver*, 119.

immersion, we conclude that, when John spoke of baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire, the term baptism did not signify to him immersion but rather an outpouring. And is it not reasonable to assume that a similar mode of applying water, viz., of pouring, would suggest itself to John when he baptized? This assumption is confirmed by the attending circumstances of his baptisms. If we keep in mind the short duration of his ministry and the multitudes that came to him to be baptized (Matt. 3:5), it becomes apparent that it would have been a physical impossibility for John to immerse all these people. Nor does the fact that John baptized ὕδατ 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 baptized. Regarding John's baptism the sainted Dr. A. L. Graebner wrote: "The gospels say John baptized ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ, εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνῃ, ὕδατι, ἐν ὕδατι. All these expressions do not necessitate the assumption of immersion. The number of applicants being very great (Matt. 3:5) and water being plentiful (John 3:23), the most decorous, expeditious, and cleanly way of administering the sacred rite may have been this, that John stood in the river, ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ, the people, one by one, came near him, also in the river, and the Baptist, lifting water from the river, poured it upon the people before him, so that the water with which he baptized (ὕδατι, or ἐν ὕδατι) would run back again into the river, εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνῃν."<sup>8)</sup> Hence, while we cannot definitely establish the mode of John's baptism, the records contain enough information to make pouring or sprinkling more than likely.

The account of the other baptisms of the New Testament leads to the same conclusion. On the day of Pentecost three thousand were baptized. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls," Acts 2:41. We ask, On which day were these people "added unto them?" The record replies ἐν τῇ ἡμέρῃ ἐκείνῃ, on that day on which they were baptized. To say, as some exegetes do, e. g., Zahn, that these baptisms were performed at a later time, transgresses the principles of true interpretation. They received the Word, were baptized, and were added to the Church the same day. Indeed, it was through Baptism that they became members of the Church.<sup>9)</sup> That is what the text states. How were they baptized? Three thousand by immersion? Such a task would have surpassed the physical strength of the apostles. Besides, where would they have found enough water for this purpose? There are no rivers or streams in Jerusalem, and to suggest the use of public pools disregards the fact that this mass

8) *Theol. Quart.*, V:5.

9) Stoeckhardt, *Roemerbrief*, 285.

baptism took place only fifty days after the Jews of Jerusalem had put Jesus to death. We do not know how these three thousand were baptized, but the circumstances warrant the assumption that these baptisms were not administered by immersion. Again, Philip baptized the eunuch of Ethiopia, who was traveling through a desert country (Acts 8:26), where even today water is found in sparing quantities. (The text has  $\tau\iota\ \psi\delta\omega\rho\epsilon\iota$ .) Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and both came up out of the water,  $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\beta\eta\sigma\alpha\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\mu\acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\iota\ \epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \tau\omicron\ \psi\delta\omega\rho\epsilon\iota$ . . . .  $\acute{\upsilon}\tau\epsilon\ \delta\grave{\epsilon}\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\beta\eta\sigma\alpha\nu\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \tau\omicron\ \psi\delta\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$ , vv. 38, 39. Does this of necessity imply immersion? If so, both Philip and the eunuch were immersed, for they are joined together by the text. Furthermore, there is nothing in the record of the baptism of Saul by Ananias (Acts 9) and of the jailer at Philippi (Acts 16) that would indicate that immersion was the only possible mode of these baptisms. Luke relates of Saul in rapid succession that he is sitting in a room, blind and in a weakened condition, that he has his eyes opened, arises and is baptized, takes food and is strengthened. The obvious meaning is that everything here stated occurred in the house in which Saul was staying, and it is very unlikely that a private dwelling would have facilities for immersing a person. Likewise with the jailer at Philippi. The events follow in swift succession: the earthquake, the opening of the prison doors, the loosening of the prisoners' bands, the despair of the jailer, the admonition of Paul and Silas, the religious instruction given to the jailer, the washing of the prisoners' wounds, the baptism of the jailer and his family, the placing of food before the guests. All this happened at the same hour of the night (midnight), so that it is difficult to believe that this baptism should have been performed by immersion. Somewhat different is the baptism of Cornelius and his household. Here immersion is practically excluded by the terms of the record. Peter asks, Acts 10:47: "Can any one forbid water, that these should not be baptized" ( $\mu\acute{\eta}\tau\iota\ \tau\omicron\ \psi\delta\omega\rho\ \delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\tau\alpha\iota\ \kappa\omega\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\alpha\iota\ \tau\iota\varsigma$ )? Note that the object of  $\kappa\omega\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\alpha\iota$  is not the person to be baptized but the water. The water is not to be prevented from being brought to where it should be used. It should be brought without delay in order that these persons might be baptized where they were. Such language does not suggest immersion.

Thus a brief review of the circumstances in which the baptisms of the New Testament were administered fails to impress upon us the cogency of the argument of the immersionists that John the Baptist and the apostles baptized by immersion, "the New Testament mode of baptism." Not one baptism in the time of the apostles is recorded in such a way that immersion must be accepted as the New Testament mode. On the contrary, in a number of instances

immersion cannot reasonably be assumed, and it is probable that immersion was never practised in apostolic days.<sup>10)</sup>

A New Testament mode of baptism is found by some in the "significance of the rite of baptism as a burial with Christ." Reference is made to Rom. 6:3, 4 and to Col. 2:11, 12, where the phrases "buried with Him by Baptism into death" and "buried with Him by Baptism" are found. This "burial with Christ" is interpreted to signify "buried under water," i. e., immersed. However, the apostle in neither of the quoted passages is speaking of the mode of baptism, but of the meaning and benefit of the Sacrament, as the contexts clearly indicate. "If such a text as Rom. 6:3, 4 ('buried with Christ by Baptism into death') be explained to refer to the mode of baptism, then such texts as Acts 22:16 ('be baptized and wash away your sins'), Titus 3:5, 6 ('by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly'), and Heb. 10:22 ('having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water'; cf. Ex. 24:8; Heb. 9:19; 1 Cor. 10:2) would, by a like hermeneutical rule, have to be explained to refer to the mode of baptism, and accordingly various modes of baptism would be taught in the texts."<sup>11)</sup> The fact remains that these symbolic references to Baptism neither imply nor specify a particular manner of christening and therefore fail to prove the assertion of a New Testament mode of baptism.

The evidence of history and archeology proves conclusively that the early Church was conscious of the fact that the manner in which Baptism was administered was not essential to the validity of the Sacrament. The *Didache*, written between 90 and 165 A. D., states, chap. VII: "Concerning Baptism, baptize thus: Having first rehearsed all these things (the explanation of the way of life, chap. I—IV; the way of death, chap. V; and the final exhortation, chap. VI), baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in running water; but if thou hast no running water, baptize in other water, and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water three times on the head in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."<sup>12)</sup> Of this quotation Harnack says: "We have here the oldest evidence for the permission of baptism by aspersion; it is especially important that the author betrays not the slightest uncertainty as to its validity. The evidences for an early occurrence of aspersion were hitherto not sufficiently certain, either in respect to their date or in respect to their conclusiveness. Doubt is now no longer

10) *Theol. Quart.*, V:8.

11) Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, 102.

12) *The Apostolic Fathers* (Loeb Classical Library), I, 311.

possible."<sup>13</sup>) And the sainted Dr. E. A. W. Krauss comments: "Dieses Zeugnis aus der *Didache*, sicher aus dem Anfang des zweiten Jahrhunderts, ist von hoechster Wichtigkeit gegenueber allerlei Taufschwermern; und man sollte es ihnen gegenueber stets in promptu haben."<sup>14</sup>) However, it is argued that baptism in the early Church by pouring or sprinkling was only an unusual or extraordinary mode of baptism. The universal custom was to baptize by immersing.<sup>15</sup>) Writes C. F. Rogers: "It is generally assumed that the usual custom of the early Church was to baptize by total immersion. . . . This assumption is based mainly on evidence supplied by literature. But we must not forget that the writings of the Fathers tend to depict the ideal in their minds rather than chronicle the actual that lay before their eyes. To find out what was actually done by the mass of Christians, we must turn to the evidence of archeology, for which data are drawn so largely from cemeteries and other regions where the popular will has always had free scope."<sup>16</sup>) The evidence of archeology is very much in favor of pouring as the manner of applying water in baptism. "The testimony of the catacombs is strongly in favor of aspersion or affusion. All their pictured representations of the rite indicate this mode, for which alone the early fonts seem adapted; nor is there any early art evidence of baptismal immersion."<sup>17</sup>) "It is most noteworthy that from the second to the ninth century there is found scarcely one pictorial representation of baptism by immersion, but the suggestion is almost uniformly either of sprinkling or pouring."<sup>18</sup>) On the basis of his archeological studies Rogers reached the conclusion that the popular mode of baptism for the first 700 years of the Christian Church was not immersion but pouring.<sup>19</sup>) However, it is not our purpose to establish what the mode of baptism in the early Church was. We are interested merely in showing that the literary and archeological evidence points to the fact that the early Church did not acknowledge any particular mode as the New Testament mode of Baptism and that it did not regard any specific form of administering the Sacrament as essential to its validity.

And this is the position also of the Lutheran Church. It is true that Luther has been called an immersionist, but the fact

13) Harnack, *Die Lehre der zwoelf Apostel*, 23.

14) *Lehre und Wehre*, 54:250. Cf. Cyprian's comments on clinic baptisms, e. g., Walther, *Pastorale*, 118.

15) Hoefling, *Sakrament der Taufe*, 50.

16) Rogers, *Baptism and Christian Archeology*, 240.

17) Withrow, *The Catacombs of Rome*, 535.

18) Bennett, *Christian Archeology*, 406.

19) Rogers, *Baptism and Christian Archeology*, 406.

of the matter is that, while Luther spoke favorably of immersion for reasons of symbolism (X:2112), he expressly declares that immersion is not essential to a legitimate baptism (XIX:66) and defines βαπτίζειν as *baden, oder eintauchen, oder nass machen mit Wasser* (X:2131). The Large Catechism therefore defines baptism as pouring (36, 45), immersion (65), sprinkling (78). The Lutheran Church believes that "the purpose of the Sacrament of Baptism is not 'the putting away of the filth of the flesh' (1 Pet. 3:21), but the saving of the soul, its cleansing from sin; neither is the power of Baptism in the water itself (wherefore much water has no more power than little water); therefore, in whichever way the water is applied in the act of baptizing (by immersing, pouring, or sprinkling), provided that it is applied in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, it is in every respect a true Baptism. The Christian pastor of the orthodox Lutheran Church should conform to the usage of his Church in reference to the mode of baptism, as a testimony against the Baptists, who even today insist that immersion is essential to a valid baptism. According to the Word of God the particular mode of baptizing is in itself a matter of Christian liberty. Gal. 2:4, 5." <sup>20)</sup>

Yet even in the Baptist Church a change in the traditional attitude towards non-immersed Christians is taking place. Writes Dr. W. R. McNutt: "Close Communion, once quite universal among Baptists, and still largely so in the Southern States, is really close Baptism: only those may come to the table who are church-members by virtue of their being immersed believers. This polity has been long on the shift; the invitation to fellowship in the Lord's Supper having first been extended to all Baptists, then to members of immersing churches other than the Baptists, and finally to 'all who love the Lord Jesus Christ.' This indicates, of course, that the basis of welcome to the sacred meal has moved, in the open Communion churches, from baptism to discipleship, from a symbolic rite to the regenerate life symbolized thereby. . . . Certain English Baptist churches long since began to practise mixed membership, that is, a membership composed of the immersed, those otherwise baptized, and those unbaptized by any method. Changing conditions in the States, particularly the overchurching of communities and the rapid rise of unchurched suburban areas, . . . have conspired to force open the doors of many American Baptist churches to non-immersed members from pedobaptist churches. The change has been going on quietly as a matter of necessity, if not always of desire. One or two partial studies of the extent of open membership polity have been made, and these afford ground

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20) Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, 104.

for the assertion that today it is the practise of between 500 and 1,000 churches, almost exclusively within the Northern Convention. The status of these members coming from non-immersing churches is not yet uniformly fixed. Their status ranges all the way from loosely affiliated members, with limitations of rights and privileges, to membership in complete and regular standing.—This means a decided change of the hitherto uniform basis of membership: a change from the regenerate, immersed believer to the regenerate, baptized (of whatever mode) believer. This shift will be seen to be a lineal development of open Communion. . . . In fairness to the increasing number of open membership Baptist churches we must set down their conviction that by this practise they in no wise relax their allegiance to the New Testament mode of baptism; for whenever they baptize, they immerse. They administer the rite in no other form, nor do they contemplate doing so. They are as positive immersionists as their fathers; they merely eschew their sectarianism by freely fellowshipping Christians to whom time has given many names."<sup>21</sup> WALTER A. BAEPLER

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## Holy Scripture or Christ?

(Concluded)

Men are asking us to substitute for the authority of Scripture the authority of Christ or at least to subordinate the former to the latter. If we did that, we would be left without any authority for our teaching and without any foundation for our faith. And that means, of course, that there would be no Christian theology and no Christian religion.

### III

These men are, *in the first place*, asking us to discard the authority of Scripture, of parts of the Scripture and of all Scripture.

We shall have no difficulty in proving that they deny the authority of *parts of the Bible*. They say it loudly enough. Before we can raise the charge, they admit it; for they glory in it. They raise the charge against us that we believe every word of the Bible. They insist that it is the right and the duty of the Christian theologian to free the Bible of its many blemishes and to inform the Christians of its many mistakes. You have heard Brunner saying that much of the Bible needs to be chiseled off. You have heard Alleman declaring that that part of the Bible is infallible which is Gospel, and must be accepted, but that the other parts, the dregs, the trifles, and the filth, must be cast out. These men do

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<sup>21</sup>) McNutt, *Polity and Practise in Baptist Churches*, 127 ff.