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The Meaning of the Formula of Baptism

The formula of Baptism is definitely fixed. Christ, who instituted Baptism, tells us that we should baptize "εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος," Matt. 28:19, thereby distinguishing His Baptism from all others that in His days were to be found among both Jews and Gentiles. We have neither reason nor authority to change the wording of this formula. For further information on this point we refer to Walther, *Pastorale*, pp. 110—118, and to Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, Vol. III, pp. 302 to 308.

However, the validity of Baptism does not depend upon the mere recitation of these words, which are different in every language, but upon the sense in which they are used. The Trinitarian formula must admittedly and confessedly also be taken in the Trinitarian sense. Repeating the words, but expressly denying their sense and meaning as referring to the Triune God, as anti-Trinitarian sects do, invalidates Baptism. What the sense of these words is we learn from the Scriptures, but in which sense churches take these words we must learn from their confessions.

But what does it mean to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost"? Dietrich, *Catechism*, Question 475, says: "Es heisst, auf Geheiss der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit und mit Anrufung derselben den Täufling mit Wasser besprengen, begiessen oder eintauchen zur Vergebung der Sünden." He defines the phrase "in the name of" as "auf Geheiss," or "at the command of," the Triune God. The same explanation we have found elsewhere. We can readily understand this interpretation. For if we look at the English words "in the name of the Father" etc. and at the German "im Namen des Vaters" etc., our first impression will be that we are to baptize, apply water, "at the command" of the Father, etc. For to do something "in one's name" ordinarily means to do it at his behest or in his stead. And it is certainly true that the Triune God stands behind the command that in Baptism

water should be applied and that he who baptizes does so at the command of God. But the question is, Do the words "εἰς τὸ ὄνομα" mean that? Does Christ wish to tell us nothing more than that we are to baptize at the command of the Triune God? Let us see.

Christ says, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." He tells us to go and make disciples of all nations, and this is to be done by baptizing and by teaching them. In these words we have His command. But what sense would there be in saying that Christ *commands* us to baptize the nations at the *command* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost? The Son of God commands us to do something at the command of the Triune God? Must it not appear that the words "in the name of" have another meaning?

Let us furthermore look at the preposition "eis," which, with but few exceptions, is most commonly used with the word "baptize." The basic significance of this preposition is direction; it may indicate the aim and purpose and also the end and result of an action. Thus John said that he baptized "εἰς μετάνοιαν," Matt. 3:11, and Peter told the people to be baptized "εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν," Acts 2:38. The aim and end of Baptism is to work a change of mind and to impart forgiveness of sins. By Baptism a certain relation and connection is established between the person baptized and the things for or unto which he is baptized. In Rom. 6:3 we read that "so many of us were baptized" εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν were baptized "εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ." The preposition "eis" does not mean that we were immersed into Christ and into His death, but that by Baptism we entered into so close a relation with Christ that we become partakers of His death, "planted together in the likeness of His death," v. 5. Christ died not only *for* our sins, paying the penalty of our guilt, but He died also *unto* sin once," v. 10; He is through with this business of atoning for sin at which He labored during the days of His flesh; He now lives unto God. By our Baptism "εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ" we are put into fellowship with all this. In Christ we died not only for our sins, but also unto sin; while we continue to live in this world, we should reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin, having nothing to do with it, but to be alive unto God, walking in newness of life. Thus to be baptized "εἰς τ." means that by Baptism a definite relationship is established between the person baptized and the object unto which he is baptized.

This is true also when the preposition "eis" points to a person. In 1 Cor. 10:2 we read: "All were baptized εἰς τὸν Μωϋσῆν in the cloud and in the sea." This does not mean that this baptism was commanded by Moses, but that thereby the children of Israel

entered into a definite relation to, and union with, Moses; he became their teacher and leader, and they became his followers and disciples. "Durch die Wolke und das . . . Wasser wurden sie alle auf oder in Mose getauft, d. h., dem Mose, als dem Knechte des Herrn, zu glauben verpflichtet, an ihn gewiesen, und des Heils, das Gott durch seine Hand an ihnen tun wollte, versichert." *Hirschberger Bibel*. Such is also the meaning in Gal. 3:27: "As many of you as have been baptized εἰς Χριστόν have put on Christ." It is true that Christ commanded all men to be baptized, but that is not what this text teaches. Here we are told that in Baptism we have "put on Christ." Therefore to be baptized into, "eis," Christ means to enter into so close a union with Him that we receive all the blessings of His redemption.

But one might say that the baptismal formula does not read that we should baptize "into the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," but that we do so "in (into) the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," and that this can only mean that at the command and in the stead of God we apply the water. Let us see.

Baptism being instituted by Christ, there is no doubt that Paul, like Peter, Acts 10:48, commanded the people should be baptized. Yet, when a division arose in the congregation at Corinth, one saying, I am of Paul, another, I am of Apollos, another, I am of Cephas, 1 Cor. 1:13, Paul asks them, "Were ye baptized εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Παύλου, v. 13, and he thanks God that he baptized but a few, "lest any should say that he had baptized εἰς τὸ ἑμὸν ὄνομα," v. 15. These expressions certainly cannot mean that these people were baptized at the command of Paul, but, as v. 15 clearly indicates, that by such baptism they would have believed themselves to have entered into such a union with Paul as to be his. Paul denies that such was the result of their baptism, for as he was not crucified for them, they could not be baptized into or unto him, as though they must look to him for their salvation. Now, here we have the phrase to be baptized "in the name of a person," yet it does not mean to be baptized at his command, but rather to enter into personal relation with him.

In Acts 19:5 we read: "When they heard this, they were baptized εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ." This text presents some difficulty. We hold that these words are still the words of Paul, saying that when the people heard John the Baptist testify of Christ, they were then baptized by John the Baptist into the name of Christ. Hence the baptism of John was indeed a baptism "eis onoma tou Kyriou Jesou." In this case the phrase cannot mean "at the command of Christ," since Christ had not yet instituted His Baptism. The other explanation of this text is that these "certain disciples," v. 1, had been baptized "unto John's baptism,"

v.3, but, not understanding the real purpose of this Baptism, regarded themselves merely as disciples of John. Now, Paul explains to them that John's baptism was indeed a baptism unto Christ. Yet having never regarded it as such and being in doubt as to whether they had by John's baptism really become the disciples of Christ, Paul, to reassure them, rebaptized them. This, then, would be a case of making a baptism, the validity of which is doubtful to the baptized person, certain and sure to him by rebaptizing him.* But also here the phrase "to baptize in the name of the Lord Jesus" does not mean "at His command," but to enter into discipleship of the Lord Jesus by baptism.

Thus, according to the usage of Scriptures, to be baptized "into some one" or "into the name of some one" does not mean to be baptized at his command, but to enter by such baptism into a very definite relation and union with him. This is true also of the baptismal formula to "baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

The "onoma" of God does not merely denote the several distinctive names by which the three Persons of the Godhead are known and designated, but, as in the Second Commandment and in the First Petition, it stands for the Divine Being itself as He has revealed Himself to men. It is the sum total of the Law and the Gospel, it includes all the grace and blessings He promised to man and also the worship and service He expects of man. A synopsis and, at the same time, an explanation of the "onoma" of the Triune God we have in the explanations of the Three Articles, where we briefly confess what each Person of the Trinity has done, is doing, and will do for us, and what we, in return, owe Him for all this mercy and goodness.

And into this "onoma" of God we are baptized. By Baptism we personally enter into this setup, accepting what God offers to us, and assuming those duties He expects of us. For this reason Baptism has been called the "sacramentum initiationis." By initiation we enter into the fellowship of a society and thereby become partakers of all its rights and all its duties. Or, when a person becomes a citizen of our country, he not only renounces all allegiance to every other government, but, more positively, he enters into a very definite relationship to the government of our country; all rights and privileges of American citizenship are conferred upon him, and he assumes all the duties and responsibilities of an American citizen. By baptism we are as it were initiated into union and

* We prefer the interpretation which holds the baptism given these people was invalid because John's baptism was superseded by Christian baptism and whoever, after Christ had instituted the latter, still baptized "with John's baptism" performed an unauthorized ceremony [Editors.]

communion with the Triune God, we enter into covenant relation with Him. We who were by nature strangers and foreigners now become fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, partaking of all the blessings of His grace, submitting to His rule and guidance, and promising loyalty and obedience, thus taking upon ourselves the "yoke" of Christ, Matt. 11:29. In Baptism God adopts us as His children, and we acknowledge Him our Father; in Baptism we put on Christ and are clothed with the garments of His righteousness, Gal. 3:26, 27; in Baptism we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, who regenerates and renews us, John 3:5; Titus 3:5, 6, and is the earnest of our inheritance, Eph. 1:14. Thus these words of the baptismal formula, "ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος," are really a brief summary of all the blessings into and unto which we are baptized; they are the Gospel promise that is "connected with" the water of Baptism.

That grace and forgiveness are offered and imparted to us in Baptism we learn also from many other texts, as Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 3:21. But we should expect that, even as in the words of institution of the Lord's Supper both the command and the promise of God are contained, we find both, command and promise, also in those words by which Christ instituted Baptism. And so it is. There is the command of Christ to baptize the nations, and there is also the promise of all the blessings the Triune God holds out to us, and finally there is indicated also the power and efficacy of Baptism, which makes men disciples of Christ by regeneration and renewing.

Dr. Stoeckhardt writes in his *Roemberbrief*, p. 284: "Da also die urspruengliche Bedeutung 'tauchen' ganz zurueckgetreten ist, so liegt auch solchen Verbindungen wie βαπτίζεσθαι εἰς ὄνομα τινος, Matth. 28: 19; Acts 8:16; 19:5; 1 Cor. 1:13, 15, εἰς τὸν Μωϋσῆν, 1 Cor. 10:2, εἰς Χριστόν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ, nicht die Vorstellung zu Grunde, als wuerde der Taeufeling in Moses, in Christum, in Christi Namen, in Christi Tod eingetaucht, sondern das εἰς deutet auf die Beziehung, in welche der, welcher getauft wird, zu der betreffenden Person oder Sache gesetzt wird. Wir sind auf Christum getauft, das heisst nichts anderes, als dass wir durch die Taufe zu Christo Jesu in Beziehung, mit ihm in Verbindung und Gemeinschaft gesetzt worden sind."

Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. I, p. 149, has this: "Baptizing into the name has a twofold meaning, 1. *Unto*, denoting *object* or *purpose*, as εἰς μετάνοιαν, unto repentance; εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, for remission of sins (Acts 2:38). 2. *Into*, denoting *union* or *communion with*, as Rom. 6:3, "baptized into Christ; into His death"; i. e., we are brought by Baptism into fellowship with His death. Baptizing into the name of the Holy Trinity implies spiritual and mystical union with Him. . . . The

name is not the mere designation, a sense which would give the baptismal formula merely the force of a charm. The *name*, as in the Lord's Prayer (Hallowed be Thy name), is the expression of the sum total of the Divine Being; not His designation as God or Lord, but the formula in which all His attributes and characteristics are summed up. It is equivalent to His person. The finite mind can deal with Him only through His name; but His name is of no avail detached from His nature. When one is baptized into the name of the Trinity, he professes to acknowledge and appropriate God in all that He is and in all that He does for man. He recognizes and depends upon God the Father as his Creator and Preserver; receives Jesus Christ as his only Mediator and Redeemer, and pattern of life; and confesses the Holy Spirit as his Sanctifier and Comforter."

Also the synodical *Catechism* (Schwan), Question 277, offers this explanation of baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, "It is receiving into communion with the Triune God by Baptism according to Christ's command."

Let us, then, in teaching our children not lightly pass over these important words, explaining them to mean merely that in Baptism water is applied at the command of the Triune God. But let us convey to them, as far as they are able to grasp it, the Gospel meaning of these words. Let us frequently remind also our adult congregations of this blessed truth that by being baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost we have in early infancy personally and individually entered into so close a union and communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as to become God's own and partakers of all His blessings, and that this fellowship, if deeply appreciated by us, will be reflected in our lives, Rom. 6:1-14. Baptism is of importance not only to the infant that is being baptized, but also to the adult Christian that has been baptized, and it should be a source of comfort and strength to him all the days of his life.

E. W. A. KOEHLER

To What Extent May and Must Action be Taken in the Case of Mixed Marriages?

(A Conference Paper)

I

A mixed marriage is sometimes thought of as the marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. But that is not the only meaning attaching to the term. Quite often it designates the marriage of persons of different faiths or religions.