

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF
BAPTISM.

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The recent emphasis laid upon Eschatology, in thinking circles, bids fair to yield useful contributions to theological study. Already attempts are being made to understand a little more clearly something of the person of Jesus; what Professor Burkett, in his preface to Schweitzer's book calls "the greatest historical problem in the history of our race." (P. vi., *The Quest of the Historical Jesus.*) Another interesting question is the relation of Eschatology to Ethics. Is the teaching of Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, merely an "Interimsethik" or absolute and binding for all time? We cannot stay to argue this question out, but one thing does appear evident, that much of the arbitrariness and seeming intolerance of Jesus can be best accounted for by the eschatological framework of many of His ideas. In the relations between Eschatology and the Sacraments, Schweitzer seems to have opened up a suggestive connection, and our purpose in this article is to examine, particularly, the significance of Baptism in the light of "thorough-going Eschatology." Schweitzer claims both the Sacraments of Baptism and of the Supper as being essentially eschatological in origin and purpose. In the limits of this article it is impossible to handle both adequately and so we propose to take Baptism and examine Schweitzer's assertion. The main points set forth (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 375-379) are: I. That Baptism is the sign whereby salvation was assured to the eschatological community; "assurance of salvation in a time of eschatological expectation demanded some kind of security for the future of which the earnest could be possessed in the present." (376.)

II. That "the baptism of John was an eschatological sacrament pointing forward to the pouring forth of the spirit and to the judgment, a provision for 'salvation.'" (p. 377.)

III. That the eschatological view of this Sacrament explains the early history of Christian dogma. He claims that "the thorough-going eschatological interpretation of the life of Jesus puts into the hands of those who are reconstructing the history of dogma in the earliest times an explanation of the conception of the sacraments, of which they had been able hitherto only to note the presence as an X of which the origin was undiscoverable, and for which they possessed no equation by which it could be evaluated." (p. 379.)

It will be at once agreed that if this last assertion is well-founded, the eschatological school will have rendered a service to the Christian churches. For all the churches, save the Quakers, practice in some form or another the rite of Baptism. Whether, with the Greek Church, with its trine immersion, or the Baptist section of the Free Church of England, with its single immersion; with the Roman Catholic and High Anglican emphasis upon its magical efficacy in removing original sin from new-born babes; or in Low Anglicanism and the majority of the Free Churches in England, and both Presbyterian Churches in Scotland, to whom the sacrament is a mere "christening," a sort of naming ceremony: however they may differ in mode and meaning, these churches continue the custom of Baptism. In view of that diversity of meaning, Schweitzer's sarcastic allusion to baptism and the Lord's Supper as an "algebraic X" is not too severe. And if we can restore the primitive meaning to this ceremony of baptism that will be surely a gain; for practices out of which the meaning and sense have vanished are dead-weight in a thoughtful age, and a menace to a spiritual, which is also an intelligent, Christianity.

(i) Our first point to examine is the contention that "Baptism is the sign whereby salvation was assured to the eschatological community." Schweitzer (p. 375) says: "We never realize sufficiently that in a period when the judgment and the glory were expected as close at hand, one thought arising out of this expectation must have acquired special prominence—how, namely, in the present time, a man could obtain a guarantee of coming scatheless through the judgment, of being saved and received into the Kingdom, of being signed and sealed for deliverance amid the coming trial, as the chosen people in Egypt had a sign revealed to them from God by means of which they might be manifest as those who were to be saved. But once we do realize this, we can understand why the thought of signing and sealing runs through the whole of the apocalyptic literature."

He cites instances. In the Prophets: Ez. 9:4-6; in Pseudepigrapha, Ps. Sol. 15:8, "the saints of God bear a sign upon them which saves them"; he then leaps to Paul; citing Gal. 6:17, "the marks of Jesus"; 2 Cor. 4:10, "the 'dying' of Jesus"; and the emphasis on baptism as a "burial" in which the sign is received; and then adduces the passages upon "sealing," 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30. Then he goes to the Shepherd of Hermas (Vis. 3, and Sim'l 9:16), and finally rests in Apoc. of John with its many references to sealing (Rev. 9:4-5; 13:16ff.; 20:4; 14:1.) "Baptism is the seal, the earnest of the spirit, the pledge of that which is to come." (p. 375.)

It is noteworthy that Dr. Sanday (*The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, pp. 105-6) endorses the view of Schweitzer. "Baptism was a sign of deliverance by which the Lord would know them that are His in the judgment that was to come. Schweitzer (he says) is quite right in saying that this is the conception that prevailed throughout the early church."

Prof. E. S. Scott, one of the most "thorough-going" of the young Presbyterian scholars, supports

Schweitzer's view of the connection of Eschatology and Baptism. In *The Kingdom and the Messiah*, p. 254, he says, "To this very day in the worship and the sacraments * * * the church preserves its links with the apocalyptic tradition."

An examination of Schweitzer's argument reveals some confusion and vagueness of thought. The "assurance," which must be inward, is mixed up with the ritual of baptism, which is outward. In no way does he indicate how baptism could be a distinguishing mark or "seal." Circumcision, to which he alludes in his reference to the Exodus, gave a corporeal mark; the racial sign of a son of Abraham. But baptism could be no distinctive sign.

The passages quoted by him do not support his contention with directness. It has never been clearly shown that the baptism of John had any parallel in the Old Testament. In the *Journal of Theological Studies* for April, 1911, the usual references given are analyzed and the conclusion reached that the submersion, which was the mode of John's baptism, has no Jewish precedent for it prior to John's time. Dr. Sanday himself has noted that point. (In Hasting's D. B., vol. II., p. 610 b.), when he says "an act (of baptism) bore a certain resemblance to those ceremonial washings with which the Jews were familiar enough, and which held a specially prominent place in the ritual of the Essenes. But it differed from all these in that it was performed once for all, and not repeated from day to day."

Gal. 6:17 and 2 Cor. 4:10 hardly fit the framework into which Schweitzer forces them; for the "marks of Jesus," "the bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus" are patient of another and more natural interpretation. The passages from Revelation never once mention baptism in the context; and whilst it is true that they are eschatological marks or "signs" whereby the "redeemed" escape the judgment, yet that is another thing from say-

ing baptism means the same. This must be proved, and that Schweitzer hardly accomplishes. Again, when he says "Baptism is the seal, the earnest of the spirit, the pledge of that which is to come;" Schweitzer hardly makes the point good, by alluding to 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30. In the Corinthian passage the reference to baptism is far to seek: "Now he that stablisheth us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God: who also sealed us and gave us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." The Spirit, not the rite, is the seal, as both the Ephesian passages explicitly assert. As Bishop Westcott states (Ep. to Ephes., p. 17): "Here the Spirit is regarded as the instrument with which believers are sealed." And Schweitzer has the doubt of Bishop Lightfoot against his assertion; for in a note on Clem. Rom. (2 ad Cor. cap. vii), he says, "it may be questioned whether St. Paul (2 Cor. 1:22, Ephes. 4:30) or St. John (Rev. 9:4) used the image of the seal with any direct reference to baptism." Even Dr. Harnack feels the relation of baptism to sealing is vague, for he writes (*Hist. of Dog.*, Vol. 1, p. 207, E. Tr.): "Baptism in being called the seal, is regarded as the guarantee of a blessing, not as the blessing itself, at least the relation to it remains obscure." So then we may regard Schweitzer's categorical assertion with some misgiving, and say that proof remains to seek that "baptism is the seal."

(ii.) When we turn to the second of Schweitzer's positions, connecting John's baptism with the pouring forth of the Spirit and the judgment, we approach that aspect where the new eschatology is suggestive. The broad line of cleavage between the Roman Catholic and Protestant branches as regards the Sacraments, has been whether a magical efficacy lay in them; or whether they were merely symbols. Schweitzer insists on John's baptism as meaning more than mere symbolism. "It is a mistake to regard baptism with water as a symbolic act in the modern sense, and make the Baptist decry his own

wares by saying: 'I baptize only with water, but the other can baptize with the Holy Spirit.' He (John) is not contrasting the two baptisms but connecting them—he who is baptized by him has the certainty that he will share in the outpouring of the Spirit which shall precede the judgment, and at the judgment shall receive forgiveness of sins, as one who is signed with the mark of repentance. The object of being baptized by him is to secure baptism with the Spirit later. The forgiveness of sins associated with baptism is prophetic, it is to be realized at the judgment." (P. 376.)

One feels that he is closer to New Testament thought here than the Church "symbols" are. And one regrets that he did not proceed to fill up the sketch of his position as a thorough-going Eschatologist by showing how much eschatology lies behind the Spirit in the New Testament. And in the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the distinctive sign and seal, about which Schweitzer, as we have seen, gets confused. Let us look at these points more closely. As regards the connection of the Baptism of John with the "Christian" baptism, if we may use that word, the incident of St. Paul at Ephesus is very striking. Acts 19:1-7. To Paul the decisive test is: "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" The answer is: "Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Ghost was given," or as R. V. marg., "whether there is a Holy Ghost." John's baptism is not enough. Paul says, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Jesus." Thereupon they are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. At first sight this incident goes against Schweitzer's theory of the eschatological character of John's baptism. But allowance must be made for lapse of time and change of country. The essential difference between the baptisms, is brought out; one is by water, the other is "unto the name of the Lord Jesus" with the accompanying

gift of the Spirit, marked by "speaking with tongues and prophesying." That difference is the one John himself laid stress upon, when he compares his functions with those of Jesus: "I indeed baptize you with water: * * * he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; Mk. 1:8, omitting "and with fire.")

Put that conception alongside of the general practice of the churches, and how much more real and close to psychological fact it is, and how much spiritual gain to the churches would accrue by the resumption of the New Testament point of view. It is true the Anglican Church has a form for the baptism of such as are of riper years; but how often does one see that form adopted?—the only form which comes close to the spiritual realities of regeneration. For in *every* case in the New Testament, baptism is enjoined upon believers; is a personal act of confession for sin; follows upon repentance; all psychological states of mind which are only possible to persons of some age. How rich then would be the gain of significance this rite teaches were the churches to resume the apostolic practice of "Christian" baptism! The gain will be greater still if we emphasize the "baptism of the Spirit."

In the "Baptism with the Holy Spirit" which Jesus will initiate we come closest to the eschatological element in baptism. St. Peter rightly saw that connection at Pentecost when he cited Joel 2:28-32. It is the prerogative of the Messiah in His Kingdom. Two elements in that Kingdom are always prominent. *First*, the Messiah Himself will be endued with the Spirit; and, *secondly*, He shall confer Him upon the members of the Kingdom. For the former, one has but to consider the Pseudepigrapha. (Ps. Sol. 17:42; Enoch 62:2; 49:3; Text of XII Patriarchs, Levi. 18; Judah 24) for abundant references to this eschatological feature of the Kingdom. In face of such passages, especially Judah 24 ("the heavens will open

over Him to give the blessing of the Spirit of the Holy Father, and the spirit of grace will be poured upon him"), it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the early Christians saw in the descent of the dove when Jesus was baptized, the consecration to His vocation. Of greater authority would be the canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament; Ezek. 36:25 and Isaiah 11:2. The third Gospel clearly indicates the preaching and healing of Jesus as due to this investment of the Spirit at baptism. (Cf. Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18-19.)

When we turn to the second aspect of the Messiah's work, the enduing of the members of the Kingdom with the Spirit we naturally have to go to the Acts and the Epistles of Paul for our illustrative material. But before doing so, a point bearing on the unity of the New Testament as a whole confronts us. We have shown above that all the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Luke 3:16), and we may add the fourth Gospel (Jno. 1:33), put in the very forefront of Jesus' work, the baptism with the Holy Ghost. But where in the Gospels is that prophecy fulfilled? Matthew 28:18-20 (a much discussed passage) gives the answer for the first; the truncated ending of Mark is not very decisive; Luke renews the promise, which finds its fulfillment in Acts; and John, with the discourses in the upper room carries on the promise, which is partly fulfilled with the story of the "insufflation" at the original close of his Gospel (20:22). From a literary point of view, the Gospels seem to presuppose some such knowledge of the diffusion of the Spirit as meets us in Paul's Epistles. A due consideration of that point may have much weight in pronouncing upon the historicity of the Synoptics and even of the Fourth Gospel. But we must not stay to elaborate this point. Let it suffice to say that Schweitzer, and other German critics, would have more evidence to support the eschatological emphasis if they would move farther on into the New Testament, than they can find within the

narrow area of the Synoptics where they choose to confine themselves. And until the phenomena of the Holy Spirit's working are more allowed for, one must confess, they will find the Synoptics only issuing in a *cul-de-sac*,

Leaving this point on one side, we see how at Pentecost and in the subsequent history of the early church the second function of Messiah was fulfilled: "They were baptized with the Holy Ghost." At Pentecost that is the decisive testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus. (Acts 2:33-36.) The two baptisms, of John, of Jesus, are linked together: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Messiah, unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38.) The early Christians experience in the Spirit the fulfillment of eschatological features of life in the Kingdom. The Messiah's feast is interpreted in spiritual terms, when we get to Paul's experience: "The Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." The new creation, a constant feature of apocalypticism, is already an accomplished fact to the spiritual man. "To be in the Spirit" is synonymous with being "in Christ," and there can be found the double renovation, of the man himself, "he is a new creature," (*καινή κτίσις*) and of the world around him, "the old things are passed away, behold they have become new." (2 Cor. 5:17.)

The symbol of baptism, as Schweitzer points out (p. 375) is a baptism "into the death of Christ"; in this act the recipient is in a certain sense really buried with Him, and thenceforth walks among men "as one who belongs, even here below, to risen humanity." (Rom. 6:1ff.) Paul ventures to say that even now in a real sense they are "in heavenly places in Messiah" (Ephes. 1:3), and that in baptism God "raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenly places, in Messiah Jesus" (Ephes. 2:6); and that there, "where Messiah is, seated on the right hand of God," is where our "minds" should

ever "be set"; for there our life is "hid with Messiah in God." (Col. 3:1-4.) Already through baptism the abolition of sex takes place, in a spiritual sense; another feature of eschatology which has been transmuted and spiritualized. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Messiah," where "there can be no male nor female, for ye are all one (*eis*) in Messiah, Jesus." (Gal. 3:27.) All these passages are redolent of eschatology and add new meaning to the rite of baptism. Schweitzer has conferred a service of great value upon the churches by directing their attention to this. He may have emphasized his theory too much,—the writer thinks he has,—but time will readjust the perspective and certainly leave an added content to the New Testament doctrine of baptism.

When we ask what precisely Schweitzer means by baptism being a "provision for salvation"; and how baptism saves "from the judgment," we get no clear answer. The inward ethical effects of repentance, which we should expect him to refer to, are passed by altogether. The impression left on the mind after repeated scrutiny of Schweitzer's expression is that he attaches a "magical" effect to the rite, which acts like a talisman or a charm. One regrets this because it may be used to uphold the "Sacramentarian" theory that the rite is an "*opus operatum*," irrespective of the moral state of the recipient of baptism. If that be his opinion, it detracts considerably from the value of the eschatological teaching of which he is so doughty an exponent. The magical value of baptism can hardly be extracted from the Baptist's utterances; here, as in the emphasis upon baptism as a seal, the conclusion we reach is that Schweitzer imports that content into the terms and unduly presses the language of Scripture into the eschatological mould. John nowhere says that if a man is baptized he will be saved; his emphasis is always on the *μετανοία* and the accompanying works, "the fruit worthy of repentance."

In leaving this part of Schweitzer's treatment, one does so with the conviction that he has not thought out from the point of view of experience, what the ethical teaching of the Baptist really is.

(iii) We now reach the third point of Schweitzer's position, "that the eschatological view of the Sacrament explains the early history of Christian dogma." It should be remembered that he is dealing with the Supper as well as with Baptism, and he does not separate them in his treatment; but rather buttresses each by considerations drawn from the other. We have purposely left out the case of the Lord's Supper—it is to be hoped that this will be thoroughly examined—and confined our examination to Baptism.

Schweitzer's own words at this point are, "We may think of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as from the first eschatological sacraments in the eschatological movement which later detached itself from Judaism under the name of Christianity." The value of that he says is found in this, "it explains why we find them both in Paul and in the earliest theology as sacramental acts, not as symbolic ceremonies, and find them dominating the whole of Christian doctrine." To understand his terms is very difficult, as nowhere does he hazard a definition. In what does a "sacramental act" differ from a "symbolic ceremony"? But his assertion is clear enough when he says, "Apart from the assumption of the eschatological sacraments, we can only make the history of dogma begin with a 'fall' from the earlier, purer theology into the sacramental magical" (p. 378). "The adoption of the baptism of John in Christian practice cannot be explained except on the assumption that it was the sacrament of the eschatological community, a revealed means of securing 'salvation,' which was not altered in the slightest by the Messiahship of Jesus" (p. 378-379). "How else," he asks, "could we explain the fact that baptism, without any commandment of Jesus, and without Jesus ever hav-

ing baptized, was taken over, as a matter of course, into Christianity, and was given a special reference to the receiving of the Spirit"? We have judged it best to quote his own words, rather than give a summary in our own. Here we reach the implications which underly the whole of the eschatological teaching Schweitzer advocates. He has coolly regarded Matt. 28:19-20 with an early parallel in Mark 16:15-16, as not being authentic. Waiving the latter passage, on account of the mutilated ending of Mark's Gospel; we must yet admit, at any rate, for much of British scholarship, that the genuineness of Matt. 28:19-20, has much to commend it. We cannot enter into a discussion in detail, but after Bishop Chase's examination of the passage in the *Journal of Theological Studies* (vi. 483ff.), we must still retain the passage. We have already seen that the early promise in Matt. 3:11, from the literary point of view, needs Matt. 28:19-20 to complete it. To say further, "without Jesus ever having baptized," is to treat as of no account John 4:1-2, and while we confess the great difficulty that meets us in the Fourth Gospel, one can hardly claim that it is completely devoid of historicity. Admitting the danger of reading too much into the intercourse of Jesus with the disciples during the great Forty Days (Acts 1:3), it is difficult to explain why, in the Acts the Apostles at once carry on the practice of baptism by water without some such command from their Lord to account for it. And the answer Schweitzer gives to that meets a stumbling block, if, as Schweitzer says, p. 369, "Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He (Jesus) has destroyed them." Why should they carry on eschatological sacraments if they are destroyed? No! the ordinary explanation that they baptized at His command better explains the actions of the Apostles than the assumption that baptism is the sacrament of the eschatological community. Schweitzer was on better ground when he pointed out the connection between the water-baptism and the baptism of

the Spirit. There is a great gap Schweitzer nowhere attempts to fill up or bridge. What does the baptism of the Spirit mean, and what connection is there between the outpouring at Pentecost with the Jesus of whom he says, "at mid-day of the same day—it was the 14th Nisan, * * Jesus cried aloud and expired. He had chosen to remain fully conscious to the last"?

That question still remains to be answered when all the eschatological emphasis has been made. Schweitzer held the key in his hand and threw it unwittingly away. In the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost we have the historic fact, the spiritual power, the ethical transformation of human character, the deepened experience which really, if not formally, demonstrated that the Messianic Kingdom had come, and that Jesus was the Messiah.

Our space prevents our expanding this aspect; and indeed there is enough already given in outline in an earlier part of this article. In closing may we briefly indicate some of the gains that are likely to issue from this fresh attempt to interpret the meaning of baptism. For one thing, a renewed study of New Testament teaching upon it will emphasize the spiritual significance of this rite. In face of the formalism, not to say the superstition, that clings to its observance in most of the churches to-day, that will be pure gain. It may help to remove the monstrosity of "sponsors" declaring they will do for a child what is beyond the power of any mortal to undertake for another. If it emphasizes the need of faith in the recipient of baptism, and everywhere in the New Testament that is pre-supposed, that will benefit the churches, for a believing membership will at once mark them out from the world, and thus increase the weight of the church's influence upon the world. And if there is again a seeking for the mighty energies of the Holy Ghost promised in "Christian" baptism there will be given that spiritual uplift to the Christian Church which

is the decisive vindication of her claim to be the "body" of the Ascended Lord, and that spiritual uplift will remove many of the difficulties that surround the eschatological elements in the Gospels, for we shall experience anew in our own time the meaning of the great saying, "the day of the Son of Man."