

# A DOCTRINAL MODIFICATION OF A TEXT OF THE GOSPEL

by

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## MATTHEW, ch. xxviii. Verse 19.

No other text has counted for so much in the dogmatic development of the Church as the text at the end of Matthew, ch. xxviii. verse 19:

"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you."

Prof. Swete, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, in his book on the Apostles' creed (London, 1894), points out that the triple formula "forms the framework" of the so-called Apostles' creed. He writes: "Thus the Baptismal creed is seen to rest on the Baptismal words. It was the answer of the Church to the Lord's final revelation of the Name of God."

And Prof. Moberly of Oxford in a recent work refers to the verse as a 'solemn precept to baptise in the name of the holy Trinity, which fell from the divine lips of the newly risen Lord.' I quote his words from memory.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century the test of the three witnesses 1 John v. 7, 8, shared with Matthew xxviii. 19, the onerous task of furnishing scriptural evidence of the doctrine of the Trinity. This text ran thus: "Three there are that bear witness in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the holy Spirit. And these three are one. And three are there that bear witness on earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood, and the three are in the one."

The words italicised are now abandoned by all authorities except the Pope of Rome, and are not admitted even marginally into the English revised version. By consequence the entire weight of proving the Trinity has of late come to rest on Matthew xxviii. 19. This is also the sole saying of the Lord in which the duty of baptism is enforced; and divines have also found in it scriptural authority for the innovation of infant baptism.

Thus the late Dean Alford wrote in his Commentary as follows:

"It will be observed that in our Lord's words, as in the church, the process of ordinary discipleship is from baptism to instruction-i.e. is, admission in infancy to the covenant and growing up into *τηρεῶ πάντα κ.τ.λ.*—the exception being, what circumstances rendered so frequent in the early church, instruction before baptism in the case of adults."

There has been no general inclination on the part of divines to inquire soberly into the authenticity of a text on which they builded superstructures so huge. Nevertheless, an enlightened minority had their doubts. Prof. Gardner, in his *Exploratio Evangelica*, ch 35,

wrote that they were "little in the manner of Jesus." James Martineau, in his *Seat of Authority*, remarks that "the very account which tells us that at last, after His resurrection, He commissioned His apostles to go and baptise among all nations, betrays itself by speaking in the Trinitarian language of the next century, and compels us to see in it the ecclesiastical editor, and not the evangelist, much less the founder himself."

Harnack in his *History of Dogma* (German edit., i. 69), dismisses the text almost contemptuously as being "no word of the Lord." Lastly, Canon Armitage Robinson, a cautious critic, in his article on Baptism in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*, inclines to the view that Matthew "does not here report the *ipissima verba* of Jesus, but transfers to him the familiar language of the church of the Evangelist's own time and locality."

In the course of my reading I have been able to substantiate these doubts of the authenticity of the text, Matthew xxviii. 19, by adducing patristic evidence against it so weighty that in future the most conservative of divines will shrink from resting on it any dogmatic fabric at all, while the more enlightened will discard it as completely as they have its fellow-text of the three witnesses.

Of the patristic witnesses to the text of the New Testament as it stood in the Greek MSS, from about 300-340, none is so important as Eusebius of Caesarea, for he lived in the greatest Christian library of that age, that namely which Origen and Pamphilus had collected. It is no exaggeration to say that from this single collection of manuscripts at Caesarea derives the larger part of the surviving ante-Nicene literature. In his library, Eusebius must have habitually handled codices of the Gospels older by two hundred years than the earliest of the great uncials that we have now in our libraries. He was also familiar with the exegesis of Origen, of Clement of Alexandria, of Pantaenus, and of many another ancient exegete whose works have only come down to us in fragments or in uncertain Latin versions.

It is therefore import to ask how Eusebius read this text. He cites it again and again in his works written between 300 and 336, namely in his long commentaries on the Psalms, on Isaiah, his *Demonstratio Evangelica*, his *Theophany* only preserved in an old Syriac version in a Nitrian codex in the British Museum written in AD 411, in his famous history of the Church, and in his panegyric of the emperor Constantine. I have, after a moderate search in these works of Eusebius, found eighteen citations of Matthew xxviii. 19, and always in the following form:

"Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I commanded you."

I have collected all these passages except one which is in a catena published by Mai in a German magazine, the *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, edited by Erwin Preuschen in Darmstadt in 1901.

And Eusebius is not content merely to cite the verse in this form, but he more than once comments on it in such a way as to show how much he set store by the words "in my name." Thus in his *Demonstratio Evangelica* he writes thus (col. 240, p. 136):

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"For he (i.e. J. C.) did not enjoin them 'to make disciples of all nations' simply and without qualification, but with the essential addition 'in his name.' For so great was the virtue attached to his appellation that the Apostle says, God bestowed on him the name above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow of things in heaven and on earth and under the earth. It was right therefore that he should emphasise the virtue of the power residing in his name but hidden from the many, and therefore say to his Apostles, Go ye and make disciples of all nations in my name."

The Greek words are: πορευθέντες μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου

It is evident that this was the text found by Eusebius in the very ancient codices collected fifty to a hundred and fifty years before his birth by his great predecessors. Of any other form of text he had never heard, and knew nothing until he had visited Constantinople and attended the Council of Nice. Then in two controversial works written in his extreme old age, and entitled, the one, "Against Marcellus of Ancyra," the other "About the Theology of the Church," he used the common reading. One other writing of his also contains it, namely a letter written after the council of Nicea was over to his see of Caesarea. Socrates the historian preserves this letter, but the portion of it which the citation of Matthew xxviii. 19 is made does not seem above suspicion.

In the writings of Origen and Clement of Alexandria there is no certain instance of Matthew xxviii. 19 being cited in its usual form. In Origen's works, as preserved in Greek, the first part of the verse is thrice adduced, but his citation always stops short at the words τὰ ἔθνη, the nations"; and that in itself suggest that his text has been censored, and the words which followed "in my name" struck out. In the pages of Clement of Alexandria a text somewhat similar to Matthew xxviii. 19 is once cited; but from a gnostic heretic named Theodotus, and not as from the canonical text, as follows (Excerpta, cap. 76, ed. Sylb. p. 987):

"And to the apostles he gives the command. Going around preaching ye and baptise those who believe in the name of father and son and holy spirit."

In Eusebius' citations there is also some trace of περιμύοντες "going around" having been read for πορευθέντες. And the word explains the title given to the early gnostic romances in which the lives and activity of the Apostles was decked out with miracles and absurd legends. For these romances were called the περίοδοι or "periods" i.e. "goings around" of the Apostles, or "circuits."

In Justin Martyr, who wrote between A.D. 130 and 140, there is a passage which has been regarded as a citation or echo of Matthew xxviii. 19 by various scholars, e.g. Resch in his *Ausser canonische Parallelstellen*, who sees in it an abridgement of the ordinary text. The passage is in Justin's dialogue with Trypho 39, p. 258:

"God hath not yet inflicted no inflicts the judgment, as knowing of some that still even to-day are being made disciples in the name of his Christ, and are abandoning the path of error, who also do receive gifts each as they be worthy, *being illumined by the name of this Christ.*"

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The italicised are in the Greek;

μαθητενομένους εἰς τό ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ

The objection hitherto to these words being recognised as a citation of our text was that they ignored the formula "baptising them in the name of the Father and Son and holy Spirit." But the discovery of the Eusebian form of text removes this difficulty; and Justin is seen to have had the same text as early as the year 140, which Eusebius regularly found in his manuscripts from 300-340.

That the ordinary text is of great antiquity no one will deny. We find it twice in Tertullian, in slightly divergent forms, in the treaties on Baptism, ch. xiii., thus:

"Ite, inquit, docete nationes, tinguentes eas in nomen Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti."

And in the De Praescriptione haereticorum, ch. xx, thus:

"Undecim digrediens ad patrem et in filium et in Spiritum Sanctum."

Here he omits the words in nomen, as also in his work against Praxeas, ch. xxvi.:

"Novissime mandans ut tinguertent in Patrem et filium et Spiritum Sanctum."

We may infer that the text was not quite fixed when Tertullian was writing early in the third century. In the middle of that century Cyprian could insist on the use of the triple formula as essential in the baptism even of the orthodox. The pope Stephen answered him that the baptisms even of heretics were valid, if the name of Jesus alone was invoked. However, this decision did not prevent the popes of the seventh century from excommunicating the entire Celtic Church for its adhesion to the old use of invoking the one name.

In the last half of the fourth century the text "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy Ghost" was used as a battle-cry by the orthodox against the adherents of Macedonius, who were called pneumato-machi or fighters against the Holy Spirit, because they declined to include the Spirit in a trinity of persons as co-equal, consubstantial and co-eternal with the Father and Son. They also stoutly denied that any text of the N.T. authorised such a co-ordination of the Spirit with the Father and Son. Whence we infer that their texts agreed with that of Eusebius.

There is one other witness whose testimony we must consider. He is Aphraates the Syriac father who wrote between 337 and 345. He cites our text in a formal manner as follows:

"Make disciples of all nations, and they shall believe in me."

The last words appear to be a gloss on the Eusebius reading "in my name." But in any case they preclude the textus receptus with its injunction to baptise in the triune name. Were the reading of Aphraates an isolated fact, we might regard it as a loose citation, but in presence of the Eusebian and Justinian text this is impossible. It is worth considering, however, whether the original text of the gospel did not end at the word "nations," and whether the three rival endings of the text were not developed independently, viz:

"in my name," in Justin, Eusebius, and perhaps Pope Stephen of Rome and the Pneumatomachi.

"and they shall believe in me," in Aphraates, representing the older Syria version.

"baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the holy Ghost," or similar in the Greek gnostic Theodotus, Tertullian, Latin version of Irenaeus, and the surviving Greek MSS.

The exclusive survival of (3) in all MSS., both Greek and Latin, need not cause surprise. In the only codices which would be even likely to preserve an older reading, namely the Sinaitic Syriac and the oldest Latin MS., the pages are gone which contained the end of Matthew. But in any case the conversion of Eusebius to the longer text after the council of Nice indicates that it was at that time being introduced as a Shibboleth of orthodoxy into all codices. We have no codex older than the year 400, if so old; and long before that time the question of the inclusion of the holy Spirit on equal terms in the Trinity had been threshed out, and a text so invaluable to the dominate party could not but make its way into every codex, irrespectively of its textual affinities.

Some edited concluding remarks of Fred. C. Conybeare's...

First, it is quite erroneous to assert, as Westcott and Hort have in their introduction asserted, that the text of the gospels bears no trace of having been altered anywhere for dogmatic or doctrinal reasons. And, what is more, the interpolated texts have been regularly appealed to for centuries and centuries in defense of the very doctrines in behalf of which they were inserted.

Secondly, it is useless, as a rule, to look for these old texts in manuscripts, for the Church has exercised too vigilant a censorship for them to survive.

The best chance of recovering these ancient but discarded text is to apply ourselves to the fathers. But even here we are the constant victims of the unconscious and pious fraud of editors and scribes, who in copying and publishing have regularly substituted a form of text with which they were acquainted for one with which they were not. This substitution has occurred in thousands of passages, where the older readings were from a doctrinal standpoint perfectly neutral. How much more must it have occurred where the older text was, as in [this case] examined in the above pages, in glaring contradiction with conceptions and usages long adopted by the Church? It may be confidently predicted that when the Greek and Latin fathers who wrote before 400 have been more carefully edited than hitherto from the best codices, scores of old readings will be restored in the text of the N.T. of which no trace remains in any Greek MS.

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