A COMPARISON OF THE BAPTISMS OF JOHN THE BAPTIZER

WITH THAT INSTITUTED BY JESUS CHRIST

(Matthew 3:6; Mark 1; Luke 3:3; John 3:23)

A study of the Gospel accounts which tell of the baptism done by John the Baptizer and the baptism which Jesus instituted leads to the conclusion that there is NO INTERNAL, no difference in ESSENCE between the two rites - both are means of grace, both are sacraments, in fact the same sacrament conveying forgiveness which is received by the penitent to their salvation. This conclusion, however, does not deny that due to the historical situation and the nature of the Baptizer's role as fore-runner, there are several EXTERNAL, non-essential differences.

EXTERNAL DIFFERENCES

l. John's baptisms were preparatory sacramental actions, they were efficacious in that they pointed to the certain fulfillment of the Messiah's work that was about to come.

The Baptizer's baptisms, though efficacious, were a bridge between the old and new covenants. On Pentecost the disciples of Jesus baptized in the name of Christ; the baptism of John was no longer used, for it had been incorporated into that instituted by Jesus (John 1:8, 23; Acts 19:4).

2. John's Baptism was directed mainly at the Jewish nation (Luke 1:16, 17, 77), Jesus stressed that the baptism He instituted was for all nations, including children (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:39, 41: Col. 2:11).

The Baptizer's baptism may not have been identical with Jesus' Baptism in its form, since the words of institution were not yet given (Matthew 28:19).

ESSENTIAL POINTS OF AGREEMENT

1. Both the baptism of John and that of Jesus were by divine command. Both were from the Father (cf. Luke 3:2, 3; John 1:33; 14:31).

2. Both baptisms were channels through which God conveyed His forgiveness of sins. While many Calvinistic commentators do not stress this, John's baptism of repentance was "for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3; Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38; John 3:5; Acts 19:4).

3. Both baptisms used the external means, water (John 3:23; Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Acts 8:36).

Both Jesus (Jesus' disciples baptized for Him. John 4:2) and the Baptizer baptized before the Crucifixion. On the basis of John 3:22-24 it can be concluded that they were baptizing in different places at the same time. Jesus would not have permitted the Baptizer to administer a baptism which differed essentially from His (cf. John 3:5; Mark 11:30). Let us also remember that Jesus submitted to the baptism of John.

While Reformed (Calvinistic) commentaries look upon the rite of John as being purely a symbolic act of internal repentance, Lutheran commentaries stress there was more to the baptism than just a symbolical ritual.[[1]](#endnote-1) John's baptisms actually gave to the baptized remission of sins. Remission of sins did not have to wait until after Pentecost, but remission came then and there. Jesus Himself offered forgiveness in the Lord's Supper even before His Blood was shed on the Cross.

William F. Arndt says, "Was there a difference between John's baptism and the Christian baptism instituted by our Lord? Not as far as the blessed results are concerned; John's was a means of grace as well as ours. For that reason the people that had been baptized by John were not baptized again when Christ had given this Sacrament to His church as reported in Matthew 28:19. There is no hint in the New Testament that, e.g., those Apostles who had been baptized by John were rebaptized. The difference between the two baptisms is that John's pointed forward to the Messiah who was to come, while Christian baptism points back to the Messiah who has come, and performed the work of redemption."[[2]](#endnote-2)

It is a moot question whether or not Jesus or John baptized any Gentiles before the institution of baptism of all nations in Matthew 28:19. We have no specific mention of such baptizing in the Gospels (Luke 1:16, 17; Matthew 15:24). If John baptized Gentiles then His baptism is all the more similar to that of Christ.

The baptism of some of John's disciples by Paul in Acts 19:1-5 is a special case. William Sanford LaSor says: "Of the various statements I have studied of this portion of Acts the most satisfactory is Lendki's. He says Paul was not conducting a test; he was merely interested in the particular experience of these Christians. Some new converts insist that all believers must be exactly alike, let him study I Corinthians 12, especially verses 7-11 and 28-30. Paul was interested in knowing whether those believers had recieved the Spirit. The question turned up an unexpected but very serious fact: they knew nothing about the Spirit. Lenski says, "Here is the salient point in this entire account - people who know nothing about the Holy Spirit cannot have received the genuine and valid baptism." They were baptized - or thought they were - into John's baptism, but since this had not led them to the Coming One that John preached, they had not really received John's baptism. Therefore they were not truly baptized. (These may have been some persons baptized by some later disciples of John after Pentecost, just as some Jewish Christians still practiced circumcision after Matthew 28:19.) By inference we might add that Apollos was truly baptized in John's baptism, and no second water baptism was necessary."[[3]](#endnote-3)

"As for the laying on of hands, we must notice carefully that it did not always result in speaking with tongues or other charismatic gifts. These gifts are from God, not from apostolic action, and God confers them where and when He wills...Speaking with tongues had occurred (in Acts) only on Pentecost (by the Apostles, we should note, not by those who were converted) and at the time of the Conversion of Cornelius (by the converts). One marked the beginning of the conversion of Jews, the other the beginning of the conversion of Gentiles. But what does this event at Ephesus mark? ...Ephesus was to be a new center of the Gentile mission..." [[4]](#endnote-4)

1. Lenski,R.C.H. The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1946, p. 180. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Arndt, W.F. Bible Commentary..St Luke, St. Louis: Concordia, 1956, p. 109. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. La Sor, Church Alive, Gospel Light Publications, 1972, pp. 291-292. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. La Sor, pp. 292-293. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)