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THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AND HIS SINLESSNESS

AN OUTLINE DISCUSSION

THE baptism of Jesus by John is recorded in the three Synoptic Gospels ; together with the accompanying events, the descent of the Spirit and the Voice from Heaven. The fourth Gospel refers to the baptism (John i. 32-34), but does not specifically state or describe it. This accords with the supplemental nature of John's Gospel. Thus all four Gospel writers seem to have counted the baptism of Jesus an event of importance. To be sure their records of it, save for Matthew, are brief ; yet, as we shall see, there may have been good reason for this.

The importance of the baptism of Jesus is suggested in part by its position in the Gospel records. It marks the first appearance and the first words of Jesus in his maturity ; and his transition from private life to public ministry. In that strategic position, does it cast any light upon the silent years in Nazareth ; or do the words of Jesus on that occasion give any insight into the mind of Christ as He faced His public ministry ? Does the baptism contribute to the understanding of the Person and Mission of Jesus, coming as it does at the time when that Person was emerging from obscurity to undertake His public ministry ?

I

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John was unwilling to perform the rite (Matt. iii. 14). The Greek uses the imperfect tense of incomplete and repeated action. John *sought* to hinder Jesus (but did not succeed) ; John repeatedly endeavoured to dissuade Jesus. Moreover the Greek uses a compound verb which intensifies the meaning of hindering. John was protesting vigorously !

Now why did John hesitate to baptize Jesus ? We might think at first that John did not know Jesus. Certainly he would baptize no one without evidence that the baptism was justified. But John's further word indicates at once that he did know Jesus ; else never would John have said : " *I have need to be*

baptized of Thee, and comest *Thou* to me ? ” The pronoun subjects are expressed in Greek, that is they are emphatic. The emphasis is due to the primary contrast of the verse, the contrast between persons, between the “ I ” and the “ Thou ”. Out of this contrast of persons arises a secondary contrast, the contrast between their needs for baptism.

Not ignorance, then, but knowledge of Jesus caused John’s protest. But what was it that John knew about Jesus ? John’s baptism was upon the ground of confession and repentance, and unto remission of sins (Matt. iii. 6, 11 ; Mark i. 4-5 ; Luke iii. 3). When, therefore, John sought to prevent the baptism of Jesus, it could have been only on the ground of a moral purity that rendered such baptism unnecessary. So far as John was concerned, Jesus had no sin to confess, no reason for repentance, no need for cleansing. And this attitude of John found striking expression ; for before the moral purity of Jesus, John, the very prophet of righteousness, stood to confess himself a sinner who needed to be baptized by Jesus. Not Jesus, but John needed cleansing ! John, the official prophet of God, who spoke for God, who acted upon the authority of God, who would brook in consequence no interference from any man, yet stood to acknowledge the superiority of Jesus to him, both in moral character and in official authority to baptize.

How John arrived at this knowledge of Jesus, before the latter’s baptism, before the promised sign from Heaven (John i. 33), we need not pause to discuss here. Sufficient for us to know that Matthew notes the unmistakable fact of that knowledge. The “ how ” of it he did not pause to discuss.

When we consider then the nature of the baptism and John’s official position as prophet, his protest against Jesus’ baptism, and his willingness to submit himself to be baptized by Jesus, became tantamount to a declaration of the sinlessness of Jesus.

But let us turn to the other half of the scene—the reaction of Jesus to John’s protest. Does Jesus recognize John’s protest as valid, or does he indicate that John’s judgment is in error ? Perhaps the significance of Jesus’ reply to John becomes the more striking when we consider the reaction which we should normally expect from a man of integrity in such a position. It is a simple law of moral and religious experience that the holier a man’s life becomes the more aware is he of his failure and sin.

The higher our standards the more apparent to us is our failure to attain. And the climax of this experience comes when we truly face God's standard for human life—the standard of perfection. It was thus with the apostle Paul who called himself the chief of sinners. Only the man of ignorance and low standards dares to proclaim that he has attained. Now as Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized he possessed unquestionably an unusual purity of life. The word of John compels that view; and the subsequent gospel record leaves it undeniable. When therefore John said to one so spiritually sensitive, "You have no need of confession, repentance, cleansing from sin", we should expect a swift, humble, but firm protest against such a statement. Is not then the reply of Jesus to John amazing! There is no stated denial of John's word, no incisive protest against its truth, no humble confession of conscious sin. Can this imply aught else than that Jesus accepted as valid John's protest against his baptism? And this is borne out by the actual reply of Jesus, who quietly requested that John *permit* the baptism.

The word "permit" (*ἄφες*) is certainly significant. It indicates that Jesus consciously asked John to do something which was not necessary; he requested, as it were, a favour of John. "Permit", said Jesus, "this apparently unreasonable rite"; perhaps implying that later John should come to understand the act. But if, on the other hand, Jesus had been conscious of any sin because of which baptism was truly needed, would he not have used a simple command or plea, "Baptize me"? A person truly in need does not say to the one able and eager to help, "Permit me to be helped by you". A person would speak thus if he were graciously *allowing* someone to help him, the more so if that one hesitated to help through a sense of humility. But the drowning man does not say to the life-saver, "Permit me to be saved by you"; he cries "Save me".

Thus Jesus with John seemed to recognize that the normal reason for baptism did not apply. There was no moral necessity for it. Yet for other reasons, which we shall consider later, Jesus requested John to perform the rite. But if the baptism of Jesus was without moral necessity, then we have reached this conclusion, that morally Jesus' baptism by John *was a purely voluntary act*.

But grant for the moment the view that the request of Jesus, "Permit—for the time being" was really a denial of that

which John had said. John intimated the sinlessness of Jesus. Jesus, by way of terse denial, out of a consciousness of sin, reiterated his original plea: "Let me be baptized." John had said, "You need no baptism"; Jesus said (so this view runs), "Permit it"—i.e. I do need it.

Now if we accept this view, then we need to note that this is the only place in the Gospels where Jesus acknowledges sin. (The New Testament makes abundantly clear that the experience of separation from God on the Cross was not the consequence of personal sin.) Jesus ever stands as the supreme illustration of all that He taught, save in the matter of confession, repentance, and the consciousness of sin. Yet how could He have failed to be an example in these elements so fundamental to His teachings, except on the ground of His own conscious sinlessness? We need not develop here the implications of this situation other than to say that Jesus' own consciousness of sinlessness, in the light of His Character, becomes a supreme argument for its reality. And beyond this the argument for His sinlessness rises from many sides. Certainly then if Matthew iii. 15 is to conform to the rest of the New Testament we must see Jesus' reply to John as grounded in His sense of sinlessness.

It seems scarcely necessary to point out in conclusion that this fact of sinlessness concerning which Jesus and John were both agreed argues the unique Person of Christ; and this uniqueness the New Testament explains by the deity of Jesus. Thus Jesus came to the baptism with a clear consciousness of His Unique Person; or in New Testament terms, with the clear realization of His personal Oneness with God.

II

But if John's protest and Jesus' response rest upon a common recognition of Christ's sinlessness, *Why was Jesus baptized?* To this question many answers have been given (cp. e.g. summary in Smith, J. R., *The Holy Spirit in the Gospels*, p. 151). We shall return later to consider the underlying principles of these answers. But for the present we note that Jesus Himself has answered our question. In Matt. iii. 15, Jesus stated why He wished to be baptized: "for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." It seems most natural to take the "us" as referring to Jesus and John. The scene is a dialogue; the "I"

and the "you" of the preceding verse are emphatic; and it was the protest of John which was preventing the fulfilment of righteousness in that John, by performing the rite of baptism, would enable Jesus to do that which He counted an act of righteousness.

In relation to this statement by Jesus as to the reason He wished to be baptized, two questions at once arise. First: what did Jesus mean by righteousness? Second: how was His baptism a fulfilment of that righteousness?

Righteousness is a broad term appearing with varying emphasis in different Scriptural periods; according as it is used in reference to the Mosaic code, as it falls from the lips of the prophets, as we find it in the Gospels, as it acquires the theological significance of the epistles. But a study of these varying Scriptural uses will reveal this common denominator, this basic element of righteousness—obedience to the revealed will of God. And this obedience applies at once to the inner life of thought, as well as to the outer life of deed. If it be asked in what sense righteousness so defined could be applied to God, the principle still holds; God is righteous in His self-consistency, in His faithfulness to His given word.

Let us now turn back to Matt. iii. 15 with this basic concept of righteousness as obedience to the will of God. Jesus requested the rite of baptism because therein He perceived that He was doing something which was in obedience to the Father's Will, i.e. He was fulfilling righteousness.

We now face the second question, how did Jesus' baptism involve obedience to the Father's Will for Him? We bear in mind the conclusion that Jesus and John alike agreed that there was no personal, moral necessity for the rite. It was a purely voluntary act on Jesus' part. Let us note then exactly what Jesus did when He underwent the baptism. He permitted to be done to Him that which had been done, and needed to be done, to sinful men. He who knew no sin declared Himself willing to be dealt with as a sinner. He was willing to stand where the sinner must stand, and to take to Himself that which came as the consequence of man's sin. *By submission to John's baptism Jesus thus symbolically declared His acceptance (humanly speaking) of that vicarious principle upon which, according to the New Testament, His ministry and death actually rested.* The baptism was an act in its very nature peculiarly appropriate to indicate

Jesus' acceptance of the vicarious principle in relation to sinful man. Thus standing at the beginning of His public ministry Jesus indicated His understanding of the basic principle of the Father's Will for that ministry ; and symbolically, by the act of voluntary baptism, Jesus showed both His acceptance of that principle and the dedication of Himself to its fulfilment. The baptism was thus a fulfilment of righteousness because therein Jesus revealed His obedience to the Will of God.

The vicarious principle can be traced in the statements of Jesus concerning Himself and His ministry, and in the striking utterances of Jesus concerning His own death before He died. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. He came to seek and to save the lost. And see the pregnant words of John x. 7-18. Now in the New Testament the vicarious principle finds its culmination in the Cross. Thus the Cross which closes Jesus' public ministry best interprets for us the baptism which began that ministry. Set the baptism and Calvary side by side and we see how appropriate a medium was the baptism to indicate Jesus' acceptance of that principle which issued at last in the Cross. Thus the saying that "He set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem" applies not only to the time when Jesus turned finally from Galilee, but with some degree of meaning it might be applied also to that time when Jesus went down into Jordan to be baptized by John.

If our interpretation of the baptism is correct, then it is not at all surprising that following it the three Synoptists record a Voice from Heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son in Whom (in Thee) I am well pleased". For the baptism touches the whole ministry and mission of Jesus ; and well might the Father be pleased that the Son had submitted Himself to that vicarious principle which should lead to the redemption of sinful man.

But if we are to interpret the vicarious mission of which Jesus was conscious in terms of the New Testament, as a vicarious work of God for man, then the realization by Jesus of His Mission involved the concept of the uniqueness and the deity of His Person, through whom alone such a mission could be accomplished. But already in the scene Jesus' consciousness of Person has been suggested through His sense of sinlessness. Thus the baptism brings together the Person and Mission of Jesus and reveals the interplay between the two. The consciousness of His Person enabled Him to understand the nature of His Mission ;

and the nature of His Mission rests back upon and reveals the concept of His Person, and that we should find the Person and Mission of Jesus thus present in the baptism is not surprising ; for this union of the two is characteristic of the New Testament.

III

What further confirmation can we find for the interpretation we have given to the baptism of Jesus ?

(1) The writer believes that this interpretation brings it into vital and progressive relationship to the preceding event recorded in the life of Christ—the scene of the boy Jesus in the temple at twelve. And in like manner the writer believes that this interpretation brings the baptism into a vital and progressive alignment with the succeeding event in the life of Jesus—the temptation in the wilderness. Thus our interpretation would bind together in vital and logical unity these three recorded events which precede the active public ministry of our Lord. Such coherency of events would argue for the truth of our interpretation.

To develop this point further would involve, of course, a discussion both of the temple scene and of the wilderness temptation. Obviously such a discussion would be too extensive to undertake here. But we may illustrate the possibilities of this situation by touching briefly upon the relation of our interpretation of the baptism to the temptation. The acceptance by Jesus of the vicarious principle in His voluntary act of baptism indicated His readiness to undertake a spiritual ministry, the establishment of a spiritual kingdom through the giving of His own life to redeem man from sin. That the presentation of such a kingdom to the materialistically-minded Jews of the day would bring in itself a cross, needed no divine revelation. But the issue of the temptations was far more subtle than a mere conflict between materialism and idealism. Jesus had dedicated Himself to the spiritual ministry and kingdom. The drive of the temptations was to bring Jesus to attempt the establishment of that kingdom by means other than the cross ; to attempt the establishment of a spiritual kingdom by material methods. But only that which could produce an inner spiritual regeneration would be adequate for the redemption of man. Sin had cut deep into the human soul ; and the wound, like any deep wound,

could be healed truly only from within to without. In the temptations Jesus saw that the kingdom of righteousness could not be attained by feeding men with bread, by external miracles, nor by all the kingdoms of earth ; it could come only by the way of the cross. But the drive of the temptations to eliminate Calvary struck at the very principle to which Jesus had dedicated Himself by His act of baptism. The temptations thus represent the logical assault that sooner or later comes against any truly spiritual decision. Jesus' victory in the wilderness registered His determination to stand by the decision indicated in the baptism. And be it noted that the temptation to desert His redemptive, vicarious mission did not cease with the wilderness victory. The Tempter left Him then only "for a season". This temptation was ever upon Him, coming through the opposition of foes and the counsel of friends (cp. Peter at Caesarea Philippi). It was upon Him in Gethsemane ; and even in the hour of the Cross passers-by, chief priests, soldiers, thieves, united in the tempting cry, "Save Thyself!" But to the bitter end the decision of the baptism held. So that our interpretation of the baptism not only explains the struggle in the wilderness ; it holds the clue to many crisis-moments in the life of Jesus.

(2) That the baptism in principle is closely related to the Cross is further suggested by the fact that on two occasions at least Jesus spoke of His death as a baptism. "But Jesus said unto them—can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (Mark x. 38). The prayer of Gethsemane interprets the cup for us as His Death ; and thus here His death, His Cross, is spoken of as a baptism. Here is a clue from the lips of the Master that His baptism had something to do with His Cross. And again in Luke xii. 50 : "But I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened until it shall be accomplished?" His death was His baptism ; His baptism was His death ! This indeed was exactly our point. And even for Paul *our* baptism touches Christ's death : "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death ? Therefore we are buried with Him in baptism unto death . . ." (Rom. vi. 3).

(3) This relation of the baptism of Jesus with His death is further confirmed by the fact that on the two other occasions when the voice of the Father spoke approval from Heaven upon

the Son, Jesus had faced his death and consented to it. These two occasions are: at the Transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 5; Luke ix. 31, 35), and when the Greeks came seeking Jesus during Passion Week (John xii. 28). Our interpretation of the baptism with its accompanying voice from Heaven would place it in perfect alignment with these other two occasions. In the baptism Jesus accepted the vicarious principle that underlay the Cross—and Heaven sealed the decision with the Voice of approval.

IV

(4) As a final confirmation of our interpretation we turn to note that other explanations of the baptism of Jesus are unsatisfactory and inadequate. These explanations are manifold; but they may be classified around certain formative principles. These underlying principles we shall consider, recognizing that each one may be carried out with varying details into a variety of individual interpretations.

(a) Jesus was baptized to set an example for others, and lest He offend others by His own failure to be baptized. Thus Jesus later paid the temple tax; its payment had no significance for him, but it was paid, "lest we cause them to stumble" (Matt. xvii. 27).

But note as against this interpretation: (i) Luke iii. 21—"when all the people were baptized" then came Jesus to be baptized. The force of the Greek is "while others were being baptized" Jesus came. But the implication of the text still remains that many had come already to be baptized; in which case Jesus served in no way as an example for them. Furthermore the Gospels indicate that John's ministry and baptizing had become extensive before Jesus came. The multitudes flocked from far and near to hear and be baptized; and "the people were in expectation, and all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John . . ." (Luke iii. 15). Thus the purpose behind Jesus' baptism was scarcely that He might serve as an example. He came quite late for that.

(ii) Moreover we must remember that Jesus was not yet a public figure. He was unknown to John's disciples and to those that stood by. His baptism therefore could have had no particular significance to those who observed it. He was simply

one among many who came. Nor do the Gospels indicate that a great crowd witnessed Jesus' baptism. If anything, the Synoptists leave us with a sense of sacred privacy and intimacy around the event. And finally, there is no record in the Gospels that John ever pointed to Jesus' baptism as an example which others should follow.

(iii) In the last place observe that Jesus did not give as the reason for His baptism that He wished to be an example for others, or that He feared lest He cause others to stumble by its omission. In the case of the temple tax this was His motive; and when it was His purpose, He plainly said so.

(b) Jesus was baptized because as a man (truly human) He desired to conform to God's Will for men around him. Thus, for example, Jesus kept the ceremonial code of the Old Testament.

This view at least squares with Jesus' own statement—He was baptized to fulfil all righteousness. And Jesus certainly did seek to conform to all the requirements of God for men. But this interpretation fails to see any particular significance in Jesus' submission to baptism. It reduces the baptism to an act of routine, incidental conformity, one with many other such acts in Jesus' life.

But there are too many significant elements about the baptism to permit us to pass over it superficially. The Synoptics all report it, and John refers to it. The writers do not discuss it at length, for it could be understood fully only in the light of Jesus' ministry and death. (Jesus Himself intimated to John that the reason for His desired baptism could not be appreciated at the time.) Moreover the event is marked by the descent of the Spirit and the Voice of the Father from Heaven declaring approval upon His Son. Certainly the Synoptic writers regarded the baptism as an event of profound significance. In other places the Voice from Heaven marks real crises in the experience of Jesus—why not so here? Again, note Luke iii. 21, that Jesus during and after baptism was praying. To Him personally, not formally, the baptism had meaning. It was a genuinely spiritual experience. So also the times when the Gospels record that Jesus prayed are ever times of decision and crisis. Why should we not see it so here?

Furthermore, the coming of the Mighty One proclaimed by John, concerning Whom John was to say "Behold the Lamb of

God"—the coming of such a One to begin His ministry could not be regarded as a matter of incidental import. Indeed the very position of the baptism in the narrative should advise us of its significance—at the turn of the life of Jesus from private to public activity, at the threshold of a ministry which has fascinated the world for centuries.

A variation of this interpretation regards Jesus' baptism as part of his "perfect obedience" to the law of God; and therefore as an act essential to His saving work of righteousness. But could obedience to John's baptism, a local and temporary rite, be placed on a par with obedience to the moral or ceremonial law? Would failure to have been baptized be a sin, as failure to keep the moral law would have been a sin? Was there the same requirement behind Jesus' baptism that there was behind the obedience to the law "Thou shalt not steal"? Would Christ's perfect work of righteousness have been broken had He not been baptized?

(c) Jesus was not baptized for any sin of His own, but vicariously accepted the sin of man and for it vicariously was baptized. It was a temporary vicarious cleansing on behalf of sinful man.

This view grapples with the baptism as a matter of real significance, takes cognizance of the vicarious element, and relates the baptism to the whole mission of Jesus. There is no formal indifference here; but the baptism becomes a matter of vital meaning to Christ in relation to His coming ministry.

But while we should admit that the baptism indicated Jesus' willingness to assume the vicarious principle for His life, we question the actuality of any vicarious cleansing of others through it.

(i) In Scripture the Cross is for all time the basis of vicarious atonement. For those who lived before or after Calvary the Cross is the ground of forgiveness for all who turn to God in faith. What then could be the significance or the necessity of a vicarious forgiveness achieved temporarily by Jesus through His baptism?

(ii) Furthermore, the Cross becomes redemptively effective in the individual through faith. But Jesus never presented his baptism as a ground of temporary atonement through faith.

Men did not know about His baptism as a vicarious baptism ; hence never could they have received it effectively as such through faith. To be sure Jesus does present Himself to men as their Saviour ; but in the latter part of His ministry at least, He does so with the Cross clearly in prospect. Of course, we might apply a universalist principle to the baptism ; but then we would be compelled to do so also to the Cross ; but in that case there would be no reason to do so in regard to baptism. The idea that the baptism of Jesus was actually vicarious in the end becomes meaningless.

(iii) The very point of the vicarious work of Christ is that He does for men that which men cannot do for themselves. Man cannot suffer the wages of sin and yet have eternal life. But men could be baptized, and were baptized, to receive God's cleansing and forgiveness. That is, the baptism and the vicarious work of Christ simply are not in the same class. And any forgiveness that came to man through baptism must in the end rest back upon the Cross as its ground. And that the baptism of Jesus could not be vicarious actually, and is quite different from the vicarious work of the Cross, is obvious in the nature of the two events. There was nothing inherent in the baptism itself, the doing of which by Christ would meet in any real way the penalty of the sins of others. But upon the Cross we have One dying Whose death can equate the death of men for their sins, and Whose death thus can be a saving substitute for man.

Another phase of this view would not insist that the baptism of Jesus had actual vicarious effect. It would say that Jesus came to be a sin-bearer ; and that because He was bearing the sins of the world He like other sinful men was baptized. But did Jesus bear the world's guilt all through His ministry ; or did He bow in Gethsemane to receive that guilt that He might bear it and die for it upon the Cross ? But granted Jesus was bearing the guilt of human sin at the time of His baptism, how could His baptism have been related to it ? Baptism was for forgiveness and cleansing, unto remission of sins ; yet certainly the baptism of Jesus, as we have just noted, could not have achieved this result in relation to the guilt of the world. But if we say Jesus was baptized simply because He was a sin-bearer, then we have come back to the incidental and formal conception of the baptism against which we protest. If by this view, however, we mean

that the baptism indicates Jesus' *willingness* (humanly speaking) to assume the guilt of the world that He might die for it and so save man from the consequences of His sin, then we are quite in accord with it.

This carries us over to a final view (closely related) of the baptism of Jesus.

(d) Jesus, though personally sinless, yet formally or ceremonially (according to the Levitical Law) was unclean through His union with a sinful people. There was thus ceremonial necessity, though not moral necessity, for Jesus' baptism. Before His ministry, Jesus, similar to the priest in the temple, must be cleansed. This formal cleansing was that which Jesus found in John's baptism. Yet note the following points :

(i) This view runs counter to the whole outlook of Matthew's record which we have discussed ; namely that John and Jesus alike agreed that the latter's baptism was not necessary, but voluntary. Jesus does not say to John, " I must be baptized ", but " Permit it ". He does not say, " For thus it is necessary to fulfil all righteousness ", but " thus it becometh us" It was not a matter of compulsion, but of choice. Moreover, had there been this ceremonial necessity for cleansing, John would have been quick to realize it ; and Jesus quite naturally would have stated it as the ground upon which it became John's *duty* to baptize Jesus. As it was Jesus put forth simply His personal desire for baptism as the ground for John to act. Jesus did not hesitate on occasion to say " I must" nor did He hesitate to direct men to submit themselves to the ceremonial laws for purification. But Jesus introduced neither element into His baptism. And finally we cannot conceive that John, the prophet of God and of righteousness, would have submitted himself to be baptized by one who was even ceremonially unclean and in need of cleansing !

(ii) Were we to deal with the baptism as an isolated event, this interpretation might well afford a solution. But the baptism has contexts ; it is set into the life and ministry of Jesus. Does, then, this view of ceremonial cleansing bring the baptism into vital relation to the rest of the New Testament record ? To be sure it gives a superficial temporal relation between the baptism and the ministry—Jesus must be cleansed *before* He could serve.

But does this exhaust the potentialities of the baptism? Does the theory of ceremonial defilement vitally relate the baptism on the one hand to the scene of Jesus in the temple as a boy, and on the other hand to the swiftly following scene of temptation? Does it explain the apparent relation in the mind of the Master between His baptism and His death? Does it reveal adequately the vicarious principle which was involved in the baptism and which underlay the whole ministry? Certainly the baptism must not be treated as an isolated episode.

V

So we return to the interpretation of the baptism as the symbolic act whereby Jesus, humanly speaking, indicated His acceptance of the vicarious principle, and dedicated Himself to that vicarious ministry and death which He regarded as the Father's Will for Him and as the way of salvation for sinning man.

Such a view of course involves that Jesus came to His baptism with a clear consciousness of His divine mission of redemption. And in the very nature of that mission, to say that involves also that Jesus came to His baptism with the clear consciousness of His divine Person. The realization of a unique relation to God as His Father which first found expression in the temple at twelve years of age, through the years of maturing experience in Nazareth had come at last in the baptism to a full-orbed comprehension. Thus our interpretation undercuts all theories which see in the ministry of Jesus a progressive consciousness of divinity, Messiahship, and mission. Jesus moved through the events of His ministry, not with a confused mind that slowly crystallized in despair upon the fact of His approaching death, but with clear-cut consciousness as to His Person and with clear-cut purpose to do the Father's will in seeking and saving the lost. To be sure there was a progressive self-revelation of Jesus to His disciples; and a progressive unfolding of the truth to the multitudes concerning Himself and His mission, concerning God and the Kingdom; a progression determined by the capacity of His hearers to understand. But the progressive unfolding of teaching does not argue that the teacher knows not beyond the point of his exposition. Indeed, with any effective teacher quite the reverse is true.

The baptism of Jesus thus may offer some striking challenges to liberal views ; and it may have a greater part than has been realized in demonstrating the coherent, organic unity of the conservative concept of Christ and the Gospels. And coherency is, perhaps, the ultimate test of truth.

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