

**A Few Thoughts on Baptist in the Name of Jesus
vs.
the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

These were some thoughts I had with an e-mail friend some time ago.

It seems to me one has to be cautious using such passages in Acts to establish doctrine or formulate theology. Some things were still in a flux and being developed at that early time. E.g., Deacons had just been appointed but they were not considered deacons as we know them; and there were still no Gentiles in the Church, no Gentiles had been baptized yet -- all that was still ahead of them.

There seem to be several "baptisms":

1) Baptism of John (Acts 19) where they had not received the Holy Spirit and had to be re-baptized.

Acts 19:1 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples.² And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism."⁴ And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

2) Baptism in Samaria without an Apostle (Acts 8) to confirm the sacrament and done in the Name of Jesus (not specifically the Trinity). The apostles were sent to confirm from which the Church has drawn an example of the Sacrament of Confirmation as performed by Bishops. See CCC 1288, 699, 1315-1316.

3) In the Name of Jesus: Others seemed to baptize legitimately, even though it was in the Name of Jesus and not specifically the Trinity (Acts 19:5, Acts 10:44-48):

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared,⁴⁷ "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Many sects have taken this to reject the Catholic Trinitarian formula and others have said there is no Trinity -- Jesus is God and there is no other, and finally some have said the "Name of Jesus" is JWHW and therefore the Trinity. When people try too hard to build

hard and fast rules based on the development period in Acts, it can bring about many troubles.

4) Trinitarian formula used by Catholics and most Christians today (Matt 28:18-21).

New Testament is "fuzzy" about the exact procedures of initiation. The NT was never meant to be an Exhaustive Church Manual. It is made up of incidental writings ("memos") for the most part. So, it is not surprising that some passages are not clear or easy to understand (2 Peter

I tend to agree with Jeff, but I think it might be a bit anachronistic to read our complete understanding after 2,000 years of development and practice back into Acts 8 making it a final statement about Confirmation. Some have felt it was incomplete possibly due to an inadequate formula, but the apostles did not re-baptize them (as they did in Acts 19 with the baptism of John) so they seem to have accepted their initial baptism as valid and effective. The apostles came to confer the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands which is one of the reasons why only the bishop can confirm, or those who act through his specific delegation. It may have been as much an issue of authority and unity as anything else.

CCC 1313 "In the Latin Rite, the ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. Although the bishop may for grave reasons concede to priests the faculty of administering Confirmation, it is appropriate from the very meaning of the sacrament that he should confer it himself, mindful that the celebration of Confirmation has been temporally separated from Baptism for this reason. Bishops are the successors of the apostles. They have received the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. The administration of this sacrament by them demonstrates clearly that its effect is to unite those who receive it more closely to the Church, to her apostolic origins and to her mission of bearing witness to Christ."

Jimmy Akin wrote:

Q: Baptism is to be performed "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." How do we respond to those who assert that we are to baptize "in the name of Jesus"?

A: Some heretical pseudo-Christian groups -- notably the United Pentecostal Church and those belonging to the so-called "apostolic church" movement -- insist that we are not to baptize using the Trinitarian formula, that we must ignore Jesus' direct command to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19), and instead baptize "in the name of Jesus."

Their basis for this is a false theology of God's nature. They claim that God is not one Being in three Persons, but one Person who has three modes. Thus their view is called "modalism." It is also called "Sabellianism," after Sabellius, the heretical priest who

invented it in the third century. It was revived during the nineteenth century anti-intellectual American camp-revival, Holiness movement. This time the claim was the "Jesus" was the proper name of the single Person of the Trinity, and so it became known as "Jesus Only" or "Oneness" theology.

To support their view, they argue that other than Jesus' explicit command to baptize with the Trinitarian formula, we everywhere else in the New Testament read of baptism in the name of Jesus.

In reality, "everywhere else in the New Testament" is only four verses, all of which are in the book of Acts (2:38, 8:16, 10:49, and 19:5). This is, of course, an extremely shaky basis on which to rest any doctrine. If a two polls were taken, one involving one person, and one involving four, statisticians would not say that one was more times more reliable than the other. It would have a huge margin of error, especially if all four in the second study were children of the same family (analogous to all four references coming from one New Testament book -- Acts).

Protestant scholar D. A. Carson points to a parallel fallacy in Greek linguistics in which low-calibre exegetes try to build elaborate cases based on five uses of a term in the New Testament. On a database that small, no statistical conclusions can be based.

In point of fact, however, we do not read of "baptism in the name of Jesus" in Acts. Instead, we read of baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ" (2:38, 10:48), and "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (8:16, 19:5). So even Acts is not united in its expression.

In reality, neither of the expression Acts uses is a baptismal formula. Instead, they are designations of the *kind* of baptism and are intended to distinguish it from the multiple other kinds of baptism which were at that time present in first century Mediterranean culture.

The first of these other kinds was Jewish proselyte baptism. When a Gentile converted to Judaism at this time, he would ritually baptize himself in water to symbolize his purification from pagan darkness to the light of monotheism.

The second was Jewish ritual baptism. Certain groups of Jews would repeatedly baptize themselves to signify periodic purification from sin.

The third was John's baptism. John the Baptist had been moving through Palestine baptizing people to signify repentance in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. John's followers went and baptized others, and eventually John's baptism was spread around a good portion of the Mediterranean basin, as indicated in Acts 18-19, where we read of Apollos having spread it as far as Ephesus.

The fourth kind of baptism, which was really a collection of different baptisms, was pagan baptism. A number of pagan cults practiced forms of baptism at this time. For example, some cults, such as the Mithras cult, had a ceremony known as the *taurobolium*

in which an ox was slain over a grill, below which the initiates stood or reclined. The blood of the ox would then drip down over them, baptizing them in the name of Mithras. Pagan cults also had water-washing ceremonies.

In view of this great multitude of baptisms, it was imperative to distinguish Christian baptism from them. But saying, "baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" is too long an expression, and the formula "baptism using the Trinitarian formula" was not an option since the term "Trinity" would not be coined until around the A.D. 130s. "Baptism in the name of God" or "in the name of the Lord" would not do either since the three forms of Jewish baptism also shared this characteristic. Thus baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ" or "baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus" was picked, since only these characterized Christian baptism.

Thus the twin expressions of Acts, baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ" and "in the name of the Lord Jesus" are neither precise baptismal formulas, but rather designations of the *kind* of baptism -- Christian baptism -- over and against other forms of baptism.

This is especially revealed in Acts 18-19, where we read of Apollos, who had traveled to Ephesus and (before he was set straight by Priscilla and Aquilla) knew only the baptism of John (18:25). Then, while he was journeying in Corinth, Paul came to Ephesus and found some of Apollos' disciples (19:1). Finding that they had not received the Holy Spirit, Paul asked:

"Into what then were you baptized?' They said, 'Into John's baptism.' And Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:3-5, RSV).

Here in this single passage we thus have the baptism of John contrasted with Christian baptism.

Thus the four references in Acts -- which use two different expressions -- do not overrule Jesus' explicit command to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). This is an explicit, formal command concerning the propagation of the sacrament, whereas Acts' references are merely incidental, casual references to the fact that it was performed, as indicated by the two different expressions that are used in them. It is thus Christ's explicit, formal command which takes precedence over the other, diverse ones.

Thus Christ commanded, and the early Church obeyed, the command to baptize using the Trinitarian formula.

This is confirmed when we examine other first-century Christian writings. The *Didache*, written around A.D. 70, states:

"And concerning baptism, this is how you shall baptize: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit in running water. But if you do not have running water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot [baptize] in cold, [then] in warm. But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the head, into "the name of Father, and of Son, and of Holy Spirit." But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whatever others can; but you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before." (*Didache* 7 [A.D. 70]).

The Trinitarian formula -- and thus the Trinitarian nature of the early Church's faith -- is indicated not only by the double presence of the formula itself, but also by the fact that water is to be poured over the head *three* times. This is truly the faith of the first Christians.

What did the Fathers Teach about the words to use in baptism? Check out [this link](#) to Catholic Answers.