

## Sound doctrine – Trine Immersion by Dr. W. Rex Duff

The Bible declares in I Timothy 1:13, “but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly” Having come up in the beginning of my life as a Presbyterian, I did not even realize that though they sprinkled me for Baptism, they did it three times. Latter I was baptized three times by Baptist churches by being dunked once. I submitted to this, because I was told the word baptism meant to be immersed. Much later in life, while studying the early Christians I came across a concept that was very new to me, Trine Immersion. What I discovered opened my eyes, almost as much as being born from above.

To begin with, the Bible in Mark 16:16, is talking about Spiritual baptism, as the Greek bears out. It is something God does for us, not something we do (See article on Mark 16, Anabap.com/articles). This leaves us with Matthew 28:19. The Bible in Matthew 28:19 declares, “Go therefore and makes disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Here we find not only the mode, but the method.

1<sup>st</sup> principal is that baptism teaches us the Trinity. We are not to baptize in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son and in the name of the Holy Spirit. This is not three baptisms, but all three persons are represented in three persons in one Baptism.

2<sup>nd</sup> Principal is the Greek language and construction of Matthew 28:19. When translating from Greek into English, there are certain words added and even taken away in order for the reader to get a proper meaning. When words are deleted, it is called ellipsis. When the ellipsis is supplied to Matthew 28:19 with the genitive case, the expanded translation would be “Baptizing them into the name of the Father, and baptizing them into the name of the Son, and baptizing them into the name of the Holy Spirit. These additional words were left out of the original translation as being understood, as the early church demonstrated (Hodge, 1999, p.14). Would not a theological understanding of single immersion be teaching the heresy of Modalism?

3<sup>rd</sup> Principal is that in the early church, the only practice was trine immersion. Even though this is not as authoritative as the word of God, why did all the churches practice trine immersion? Mr. Reeves who translated Justin Martyr declared, “The candidates were thrice plunged under the water at the naming of the Three Persons in the blessed Trinity,” (Hodge 1999, p.17). Clement of Alexander in the second century (150AD to 200AD) stated, “Ye were conducted to a bath just as Christ was carried to the grave, and were thrice immersed to signify the three days of his burial” (Hodge, 1999, p.18). Tertullian (160AD-220AD) writes, “And indeed, it is not once only, but three times that we are immersed into the three persons, at each several mention of their names” (Hodge, 1999, p.18). Monulus (200-270AD) stated, “The true doctrine...hath always, my brethren, been with us, and doth yet abide with us, and especially in the Article of Baptism, and the trine immersion wherewith it is celebrated”(Hodge, 1999, p.19). Cyril (315AD- 386 AD) ... “they are then conducted to the laver, and asked three times if they believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; then they are dipped three times into the water,

and retire out of it by three distinct efforts.” Basil (328AD-379AD) stated “In three immersions therefore, and in the same number of invocations, the great mystery of baptism is finished.” Ambrose (340AD-397AD) stated after having been asked twice and immersed twice the following, “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? You answered, I believe, and was dipped a third time”. Chrysostom (347AD- 407AD) stated, “Christ delivered to his disciples one baptism, in three immersions”. Augustine (354AD- 430AD) stated, “Rightly are you immersed three times, who have received baptism in the name of Christ”. Gregory (388AD) ... “that by dipping the person under water three times, the death, (burial) and resurrection of Jesus Christ is represented”. Gelasius (492AD) stated, “... “invoking but once the Holy Trinity, and saying thus: And I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and let him immerse once, and of the Son, and let him immerse a second time, and of the Holy Spirit, and let him immerse a third time”. Pelagius, (6<sup>th</sup> Century). “Jesus Christ, reminds us that we should administer holy baptism to everyone in the name of the Trinity, and by trine immersion” (Hodge, 1999, pp.35-36). William Cathcart, a famous Baptist historian wrote, “Trine immersion was the general practice of Christians from the end of the second till the close of the twelfth century” (Hodge, 1999, p16). Clement (150-220 AD) "Ye were conducted to a bath just as Christ was carried to the grave, and were thrice immersed to signify the three days' burial

Moore, who was better fitted to write a biography of Mr. Wesley than any other man, in his Life of Wesley, volume I, page 425, says: “When Wesley baptized adults professing faith in Christ, he chose to do it by trine immersion if the person would submit to it, judging this to be the apostolic method.”

Martin Luther (founder of the Lutheran Church), in A.D. 1530, in giving direction for the baptism of a converted Jewess, said: “Let her be placed in a bathing tub, up to the neck in water; then let the Baptist dip her head three times in the water with the usual formula, ‘I baptize thee,’” and so forth. (Malch’s Ed. of Luther’s Works, part 10, page 2637)

4<sup>th</sup> Principal is the practice of single immersion. In the sixth century in Spain, Arian and his followers ( including Eunomius) taught Jesus was created out of nothing by the Father, a view held by Jehovah witnesses today. They declared baptism was three substances in the Trinity not three persons. They claimed there were degrees of Divinity. They taught their heresy during baptism. In order to fight Arianism in Spain alone, Pope Gregory approved in 633AD, single immersion only in Spain. After a while the Spanish returned to trine immersion anyway. However by 692AD the Council of Trullo, condemned the practice of one immersion being practiced anywhere including Spain. Therefore historically, there is no evidence of single immersion (a part from Spain for a brief period) until the Reformation (Hodge, 1999, pp.26-30).

5<sup>th</sup> Principal is what does the word Baptism really mean? The term *baptizo* means “to dip repeatedly, to immerge, submerge” (Thayer’s, 1979, p.94). In their major secular Greek-English lexicon, edited by Liddell and Scott [LS], their definition of baptizo, is “the Greek word used most often in the NT (as distinct from bapto), as “to dip repeatedly” (Liddell and Scott, Greek Lexicon)

Grimm's Wilke translates it, (1) "to dip repeatedly, to immerse, submerge;" then, (2) "to wash by immersing or submerging, to bathe, to cleanse with water," adducing as examples Mark 7:4, and the cases of Naaman and Judith; (3) figuratively, "to overwhelm," as with debts, misfortunes, etc. So much he gives as to the general use of the word. In the New Testament rite, he says, it denotes "an immersion in water, intended as a sign of sins washed away, and received by those who wished to be admitted to the benefits of the Messianic reign." Grimm gives no hint of its meaning anything else

6<sup>th</sup> Principal – Further, looking at the Greek meaning of the text. 1. A point of fact: In the original language (Greek), there are articles (tou) before Father (patroV), Son (uiou) and Holy Spirit (agiou pneumatou). Being proper nouns, the articles are not necessary. The writer put them here for a special distinction between the three - they were not to be lumped together. This is according to the so-called Grandville-Sharp Rule (Hodge, 1999).

Other similar structures: John 14:6 "...I AM THE WAY, AND THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE..." means: "...I AM THE WAY, AND I AM THE TRUTH, AND I AM THE LIFE..." John 19:20 ... IT WAS WRITTEN IN HEBREW, LATIN, AND IN GREEK. means: IT WAS WRITTEN IN HEBREW, IT WAS WRITTEN IN LATIN, AND IT WAS WRITTEN IN GREEK

7<sup>th</sup> Principal -- If single immersion was meant, the Greek writer would have utilized a different grammatical construction. A.T. Robertson, in an article on "baptism" from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (a non-Brethren publication), wrote: "The Greek language has had a continuous history, and BAPTIZO is used today in Greece for baptism. As is well known, not only in Greece, but all over Russia, wherever the Greek Church prevails, immersion is the unbroken and universal practice. The Greeks may surely be credited with knowledge of the meaning of their own language.... The Greek church does practice trine immersion, one immersion for each person of the Trinity, an old practice."

Baptism is the symbol

- (1) of a complete cleansing,
- (2) of death,
- (3) of burial,
- (4) of resurrection, and
- (5) of entering into full union and fellowship with the Triune God as revealed by Christ

Triune immersion is the only symbol that symbolizes all that baptism stands for. Note the words of Sanday on [Romans 6:1-14](#) (Commentary on Romans, ICC, 153):

It expresses symbolically a series of acts corresponding to the redeeming acts of Christ. Immersion = Death. Submersion = Burial (the ratification of Death). Emergence = Resurrection. All these, the Christian has to undergo in a moral and spiritual sense, and by means of his union with Christ." Hence, the psychological need of a true symbol, triune immersion, to teach and impress the significance of the new life.

This great sign of baptism is fulfilled in three immersions, with three invocations, so that the image of death might be completely formed, and the newly-baptized might have their souls enlightened with divine knowledge (St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, p. 59).

Here is a quote from the *Apostolical Constitutions* written sometime around 200-250 A.D. "If any bishop or presbyter does not perform the three immersions of the one admission, but one immersion, which is given into the death of Christ, let him be deprived; for the Lord did not say, "Baptize into my death," but, "Go ye and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Do ye, therefore, O bishops, baptize thrice into one Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, according to the will of Christ, and our constitution by the Spirit (*Apostolical Constitutions*, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 17, p. 263)?

The Greek Church has always baptized by triune immersion. The historical practice of the Christian church may well be summed up in the words of Dean Stanley:

"There can be no question that the original form of baptism--the very meaning of the word--was complete immersion in the deep baptismal waters; and that for at least four centuries, any other form was either unknown, or regarded, unless in the case of dangerous illness, as an exceptional, almost monstrous case. .... A few drops of water are now the western substitute for the threefold plunge into the rushing river or the wide baptisteries of the East" (History of Eastern Church, 28).

Apostolic baptism was done by the candidate for baptism plunging his/her head under the water 3 times. No assistance was necessary from another person (unlike backwards baptism) except to say the baptismal formula. Of course, infants could not do this simple exercise of bowing 3 times into the water and so were NOT candidates for baptism. Before the Reformation, infants were baptized once or three times by immersion with their faces toward the water.

To this very day, the Orthodox still retain the Apostolic pattern, and anybody joining the Orthodox Church from the Latin (or most Protestant churches), must be rebaptized the Scriptural way by triune immersion.

Up to the 13th century, single immersion was limited to Spain, but was popularized by the teachings of a Dominican monk named Thomas Aquinas. After the Reformation it became the practice of Baptist Churches everywhere.

A doctor of the Latin Church quotes Augustine in a debate about the mode of baptism, and admits that triune immersion was the common practice:

Objection 1. It seems that trine immersion is essential to Baptism. For Augustine says in a sermon on the Symbol, addressed to the Neophytes: "Rightly were you dipped three times, since you were baptized in the name of the Trinity. Rightly were you dipped three times, because you were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, Who on the third day rose again from the dead. For that thrice repeated immersion reproduces the burial of the Lord

by which you were buried with Christ in Baptism." Now both seem to be essential to Baptism, namely, that in Baptism the Trinity of Persons should be signified, and that we should be conformed to Christ's burial. Therefore it seems that trine immersion is essential to Baptism. (["Catholic" Encyclopedia](#), article on baptism).

Trine immersion signifies the three days of Christ's burial, and also the Trinity of Persons (Pope Gregory)

Apostolic Canons (xlix) we read: "If any priest or bishop confer baptism not with the trine immersion in the one administration, but with one immersion, which baptism is said to be conferred by some in the death of the Lord, let him be deposed": for our Lord did not say, "Baptize ye in My death," but "In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost

The Catholic church decreed, Can. 1, "That children shall be brought to the church, and shall there be baptized in pure water by trine immersion, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And let this be done by the priests, unless in imminent danger of death it behoove that it be administered by another person and in any other place, and then let it be performed by any one, without distinction of sex or rank." (Chrystal, *History of the Modes of Christian Baptism*, pp. 178-179).

Those who practice triune dipping are:

Greek Church.....	98,616,000
Orthodox Hebrews.....	7,000,000
Abyssinian Church.....	3,000,000
Armenian.....	1,600,000
Moravian Church.....	82,971
Brethren and others.....	300,000
Seventh Day Baptists (probably).....	50,000
Copts, Nestorians, Spanish, and the Catholics at Milan (probably).....	50,000,000
Liberal Churches, who give the subjects their choice (probably).....	10,000
Total observing "Sacrament" by triune dipping.....	160,058,971
Those who practice triune pouring are:	
Mennonites.....	75,000
Roman Catholics.....	180,000,000
Liberal Churches, who give their subjects their choice (probably).....	10,000
Total number who practice triune pouring.....	180,085,000
Those who practice triune sprinkling are: Lutheran Church.....	50,000,000
Reformed.....	

20,000,000 The Rubric of the Episcopal Church is Trine Dipping, but like the Roman Catholics and others have departed from the apostolic mode.

Episcopalians.....	23,253,000	Scotch
Presbyterians and others, (probably).....	300,000	
Covenanters.....		
200,000 Total number who practice Trine		
Sprinkling.....	93,753,000	Number of supposed
Christians.....	477,080,158	Total number
of Trine Actionists.....	433,896,971	
Leaving for Single		
Actionists.....	43,183,187	
***THOSE WHO PRACTICE SINGLE DIPPING ARE: Baptists, Disciples and		
others.....	9,220,000	Single
Actionists by Sprinkling and Pouring.....	33,933,187	
Trine Dipping above Single Dipping.....		
150,808,971 Trine Actionists above		
Single.....	290,813,984	

From these approximate statistics the kind reader will readily observe that there are nearly eighteen times as many Trine Immersionists in the world as there are Single. There are also nearly ten times as many Trine Actionists as there are Single” (J. B. Wampler’s pamphlet, “The Law of Baptism).

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