

Scriptural Evidence for the Sacred Nature of Baptism, Chrismation and Communion

This article is written in response to those who assert that the sacraments of the Christian Church are purely symbolic and not filled with the Grace of the Holy Spirit. In particular, I have recently received a booklet written by Richard W. De Hann and published by the *Radio Bible Class of Grand Rapids*, Michigan, which makes such an assertion. Mr De Hann is of the view that the Scriptures can be used to prove the symbolic nature of the sacraments, in particular the sacraments of Baptism and Communion. This paper will attempt to show otherwise.

It should be noted from the start that there is no debate whether the Sacraments are real or symbolic. The Orthodox Faith was established by the Apostles and their successors and maintained in tact by the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church has held from the beginning that the sacraments are spiritual in nature, and only in relatively modern times have non-Orthodox Christians rejected this belief. Thus we do not have two parties with differing interpretations, but instead we have those who strive to preserve the faith of the Early Church and those who reject it.

It should also be noted that the true nature of the sacraments does not depend on scriptural evidence for its justification. The sacraments were established before the writing of the Bible, and they are not subordinate in rank. The same Holy Spirit which inspired the authors of the Holy Bible also inspired the Apostles and Fathers of the Church as they taught the Jews and Gentiles about Christ and the Holy Sacraments.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. (*John 16:12-13*)

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: (*Ephesians 4:11-15*)

This is the Faith of the Apostles. This is the Faith that sustains the universe. (*From the Vespers service on the Sunday of Orthodoxy*)

Baptism and Chrismation

Baptism in the Early Church and in the modern Orthodox Church is closely linked with Chrismation, which is more commonly referred to in the biblical context as the "*laying on of hands*." Induction into the Christian church was and is accomplished by Baptism, the spiritual birth that complements the physical birth, and

Chrismation, the bestowing of the Holy Spirit onto the believer. Scriptural evidence for the meaning of both of these sacraments is abundant. Christ clearly states the need for a spiritual Baptism, and the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is full of demonstrations of these two sacraments in action. Except for one reference to the Book of Matthew, Mr De Hann makes no reference to any of the four Gospels when discussing Baptism, thus ignoring much of the evidence for a spiritual Baptism.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. (*Matthew 3:11-15; also: Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16*)

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. (*Matthew 20:20-23; also: Mark 10:37*)

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (*Matthew 28:18-20*)

Afterward he [Christ] appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (*Mark 16:14-16*)

And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. (*John 1:32-33*)

When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) (*John 4:1-2*)

One of the most explicit statements of the nature of Baptism and Chrismation and their necessity for all Christians is given in Chapter 3 of the Gospel of John.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee,

Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (*John 3:3-8*)

The phrase born again, used twice here, is especially interesting. In the first instance, the Greek reads "gennethei anwthen" and in the second, "*gennethenai anothen.*" In both cases, the literal translation is "*born from above*", not "*born again.*" The use of the phrase "*born from above*" gives added emphasis to the spiritual experience of Baptism and Chrismation.

The events of the Book of Acts provide numerous examples of a Holy Baptism in practice. In the very first chapter, Christ promises a spiritual Baptism, and from the day of the Pentecost, the day of the foundation of the Christian Church, new followers of Christ were Baptized unto the remission of sins and granted the Holy Spirit

And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. (*Acts 1:4-5*)

On the day of Pentecost, more than three thousand joined the Church, were Baptized and received the Holy Spirit. Those who would assert that Baptism is purely symbolic must somehow get around the statement made by Peter to those wishing to join with Christ:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call. (*Acts 2:38-39*)

Here Peter states explicitly that Baptism is for the remission of sins, something that is real, not symbolic. Mr De Hann, however, is unshaken even when faced with this evidence. He defers to the "well-known Greek scholar" A. T. Robertson, and offers this explanation:

"... the Greek preposition *eis*, translated 'for' in the phrase 'for the remission of sins,' may also mean *because of*. An example of this can be found in Luke 11:32, where the text says that the people of Nineveh 'repented at the preaching of Jonah.' The word *at* is a translation of the same Greek term *eis* found in Acts 2:38. The people of Jonah's day, you see, did not repent for his preaching but because of it."

Mr De Hann is on shaky ground for several reasons. First, he asserts that *eis* may mean because of, but never explains the meaning of the phrase: Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *because of* the remission of sins. It seems now to say that the converts can be baptized because their sins are forgiven through their repentance. If that is the case, then Mr De Hann has just endorsed another sacrament of the Church, Holy Confession.

Second, Mr Robertson's information about the preposition *eis* is flawed. According to *Greek Grammar* by Herbert Weir Smyth, page 376, *eis* has four uses: Local, expressing motion toward or into something, or presence before or at a place; Temporal, expressing the time at, by, up to, or until something happens; Measure and Limit with Numerals, expressing the number to which something is measured or counted; and Other Uses, which express a goal, purpose or intention. This fourth use, the expression of purpose, is the one contained in

Acts 2:38. The preposition *eis* does not express cause.

Third, given Smyth's list of the uses of the preposition *eis*, Mr De Hann's statement that *eis* means because of in Luke 11:32 is incorrect. The *NKJV* translates Luke 11:32 as "... for they repented at the preaching of Jonah." That is, they repented when Jonah spoke, which is precisely the use of *eis* described by Smyth above as "Temporal". The implication is that they repented as a result of Jonah's words, but *eis* itself only indicates the time of repentance: when he spoke as opposed to before or after he spoke. As shown by Smyth's grammar, the implication made in Luke 11:32 cannot be applied generally to the preposition *eis*.

Finally, the argument that the mistranslation of a preposition has led to 2000 years of flawed theology is impossible. The Greek Church has always held that Baptism was for the remission of sins. In order for Mr De Hann's theory to be correct, the Greek Church would have had to have based the theological underpinnings of its belief on a mistake made in the King James translation of the Bible. The Greek Church understands the Greek language very well, and it understands the meaning of Peter's statement.

The Book of Acts contains many more examples of Baptism and Chrismation, but one is particularly noteworthy. It demonstrates the necessity of spiritual sacraments and how Baptism and Chrismation had distinct purposes though they were used in combination. Paul meets some disciples in Ephesus:

He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. (*Acts 19:2-6*)

Here Paul found believers in Christ who had been baptized either by John the Baptist or by someone else in John's style of baptism. However, as shown by the synoptic gospels, John's baptism was of water, not of the spirit. So even though the disciples had accepted Christ and had been baptized with water (a symbolic baptism?), Paul saw fit to baptize them again with the Holy Baptism and to lay hands on them as well. How do those who see Baptism as merely symbolic view this episode? Mr De Hann does not mention it.

Communion

Holy Communion is the most frequently celebrated sacrament of the Orthodox Church. The Church refers to the sacraments as Mysteries because of the unfathomable nature of the workings of the Holy Spirit. In Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit infuses the bread and wine, changing them mystically into the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Gospels contain just a few direct references to Holy Communion, perhaps because the practice was only established on the night before Christ surrendered himself. However in the Gospel of John, Chapter 6, Christ speaks of spiritual nourishment and says the following:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your

fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. (*John 6:47-59*)

Now one could easily argue that Christ was speaking figuratively about the nourishment a man derives from faith in Him. But the Jews who were listening did not seem to interpret his statements figuratively. They asked, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Further, when these remarks are viewed in light of Christ's words at the Last Supper, we can see he was speaking directly.

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. (*Matthew 26:26-29*)

Mark's account is almost identical to Matthew's (*Mark 14:22-25*). In Luke's account, Christ also tells his disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me." (*Luke 22:19*)

Many who reject the divine nature of Communion, including Mr De Hann, argue that Christ was speaking figuratively here as well. But this argument has at least two weaknesses. First, Christ uses no words that suggest he was using a metaphor. He says directly, "This is my body," and "This is my blood." The context provides no evidence which shows that Christ really meant "This bread symbolizes my body," and "This wine symbolizes my blood." Those who interpret these phrases as symbolic cannot do so based on this piece of scripture.

Second, and more importantly, we must look at how the disciples who were present interpreted Christ's words. In addition to the continuing witness of the Orthodox Church with regard to this sacrament, the definitive scriptural statement on their interpretation appears in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 10. Here Paul is warning the Corinthians against sinful practices, and against participation in non-Christian sacrifices in particular:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. (*I Corinthians 10:16-21*)

Mr De Hann, though he quotes from Chapter 11 of I Corinthians, never makes mention of this passage in Chapter 10.

Paul continues speaking of Communion in Chapter 11, explaining that he is passing on the instructions of Christ. When passing on Christ's words to the Corinthians, Paul never explains that they are to be understood symbolically.

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. (*I Corinthians 11:23-26*)

Mr De Hann quotes verse 26 ("For as often as ye ..."), but skips over Paul's literal rendering of the words of Christ.

After describing the basis for the practice of Communion, Paul explains the reverence with which the sacrament should be approached.

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (*I Corinthians 11:27-30*)

Mr De Hann quotes the last two verses ("For he that eateth ...") and says that celebrating "The Lord's Supper" is a solemn matter, but he fails to address why a symbolic gesture would carry such a heavy penalty (damnation and sickness) when abused.

Conclusions

By now it should be clear that a belief in the sacramental nature of Baptism, Chrismation, and Communion does not violate the teachings of Christ and the Apostles as represented in the Bible. Further, it is my hope that readers will realize that these holy practices were instituted by the same men who spread the teachings of Christ throughout the Levant and eventually to the world. The Holy Spirit was their guide as they Baptized, Chrismated and celebrated Communion, just as it was when they wrote the Gospel accounts and letters that eventually became our Bible.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; (*John 17:15-20*)

References

All scripture quotations are from the King James translation of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

- De Hann, Richard W. *Baptism and the Lord's Supper*. Grand Rapids, MI: Radio Bible Class, 1994.
 - Smyth, Herbert Weir. *Greek Grammar*. 1920. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
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This article was prepared by *Jeff Beneker* <beneker@dg-rtp.dg.com>

The End and Glory Be to God

