

## Matthew 28:19

### εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος A Text-Critical Investigation

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Tim Hegg • TorahResource • 2006

In some recent Christological discussions, the tripartite designation included in the standard texts of Matthew 28:19 has often been suspect. The problem is that it sounds far too trinitarian to have been included in Matthew's original words. As a result, a few modern scholars have suggested that the ending of Matthew's gospel might well have been added by later scribes under the influence of the trinitarian controversies that embroiled the Christian Church in the 3rd and 4th Centuries. The primary evidence upon which such suggestions rest is the quote or allusion to this text in the writings of Eusebius. As an example, we may note his words in *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III.5.ii:

For the Jews after the ascension of our Saviour, in addition to their crime against him, had been devising as many plots as they could against his apostles. First Stephen was stoned to death by them, and after him James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John, was beheaded, and finally James, the first that had obtained the episcopal seat in Jerusalem after the ascension of our Saviour, died in the manner already described. But the rest of the apostles, who had been incessantly plotted against with a view to their destruction, and had been driven out of the land of Judea, went unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of Christ, who had said to them, "Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name."

On the basis of this Eusebian quote as well as the apparent "baptismal formula" of Acts and the Epistles, some commentators have suggested that the tripartate phrase of v. 19 was a liturgical interpolation or expansion on the original words of our Master, which enjoined baptism "in My name" rather than in the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Hagner explains:

The threefold name (at most only an incipient trinitarianism) in which the baptism was to be performed, on the other hand, seems clearly to be a liturgical expansion of the evangelist consonant with the practice of his day (thus Hubbard; cf *Didymus* 7.1). There is a good possibility that in its original form, as witnessed by the ante-Nicene Eusebian form, the text read "make disciples in my name" (see Conybeare). This shorter reading preserves the symmetrical rhythm of the passage, whereas the triadic formula fits awkwardly into the structure as one might expect if it were an interpolation.<sup>1</sup>

But even Hagner does not deny that the tripartite designation is original to Matthew's Gospel, only that Matthew may have himself expanded the words of Yeshua:

In contrast to John's baptism, this baptism brings a person into an existence that is fundamentally determined by, ie, ruled by, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα, "in my name," in 18:20).<sup>2</sup>

We should be careful not to be persuaded by deceptive pseudo-scholarship often found in our day. For instance, Willis<sup>3</sup> extracts a quote from R. V. G. Tasker's commentary on Matthew<sup>4</sup> making it appear as though the author of this exposition agrees that the tripartite phrase is not original in Matthew's Gospel.

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1. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol 33b in *The Word Bible Commentary* (Word, 1995), pp. 887–88.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 888.

3. see <http://www.apostolic.net/biblicalstudies/matt2819-willis.htm>, accessed 12/25/06.

4. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* in Tasker, ed., *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Eerdmans, 1961)

Willis writes:

The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, I, 275:

It is often affirmed that the words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost are not the *ipsissima verba* [exact words] of Jesus, but...a later liturgical addition.

But this is a deceptive quote because it represents the description of what others believe, not what the author himself holds. Here is the actual quote with its context:

Secondly, it is often affirmed, that the words *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* are not the *ipsissima verba* [the words themselves] of Jesus, but either the evangelist's words put into His mouth, or a later liturgical addition. It is argued that on the lips of Jesus they are an anachronism; that the early Church did not in fact use them as a baptismal formula till the second century; and that Eusebius of Caesarea in quoting this passage often omits or varies these words. On the other hand, the words are found in all extant Mss; and it is difficult to see why the evangelist should have inserted them if at the time when he was writing they formed no part of the Church's liturgy. It is also difficult to suppose that, if Eusebius had really known of Mss which omitted these words, some trace of the influence of these Mss would not have survived in the textual tradition. Furthermore, it may well be that the true explanation why the early Church did not at once administer baptism in the threefold name, is that the words of xxviii.19 were not originally meant by our Lord as a baptismal formula. He was not giving instructions about the actual words to be used in the service of baptism, but, as has already been suggested, was indicating that the baptized person would by baptism pass into the possession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.<sup>5</sup>

Willis also quotes from *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* in order to provide proof that scholars generally regard the tripartite phrase of Matthew 28:19 to be a late Catholic addition. However, if one consults the article itself,<sup>6</sup> one discovers that the quote given is extracted from a list of four general hypotheses offered by scholars regarding the tripartite phrase, a hypothesis which the author of the article (Alfred Plummer) rejects! Willis also offers the following quote from *ISBE*, mistakenly said to be from the article on "Baptism" when it is, in fact, extracted from the article on "Sacraments."

Matthew 28:19 in particular only canonizes a later ecclesiastical situation, that its universalism is contrary to the facts of early Christian history, and its Trinitarian formula (is) foreign to the mouth of Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

Here is the quote in its fuller context:

(1) In regard to Baptism it has been argued that as Mk 16:15 f occurs in a passage (16:9-20) which textual criticism has shown to have formed no part of the original Gospel, Mt 28:19, standing by itself, is too slender a foundation to support the belief that the ordinance rests upon an injunction of Jesus, more especially as its statements are inconsistent with the results of historical criticism. These results, it is affirmed, prove that all the narratives of the Forty Days are legendary, that Mt 28:19 in particular only canonizes a later ecclesiastical situation, that its universalism is contrary to the facts of early Christian history, and its Trinitarian formula "foreign to the mouth of Jesus" (see Harnack, *History of Dogma*, I, 79, and the references there given). It is evident, however, that some of these objections rest upon anti-supernatural pre-suppositions that really beg the question at issue, and others on conclusions for which real premises are wanting. Over against them all we have to set the positive and weighty fact that from the earliest days of Christianity Baptism appears as the rite of initiation into the fellowship of the church (Acts 2:38,41, *et passim*), and that even Paul, with all his freedom of thought and spiritual interpretation of the gospel, never questioned its ne-

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5. Ibid., p. 275.

6. James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible* 4 vols (Scribners, 1905), 1.241-42.

7. Ibid.

cessity (compare Rom 6:3 ff; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:5). On any other supposition than that of its appointment by our Lord Himself it is difficult to conceive how within the brief space of years between the death of Jesus and the apostle's earliest references to the subject, the ordinance should not only have originated but have established itself in so absolute a manner for Jewish and Gentile Christians alike.<sup>8</sup> (emphasis mine)

Willis' deception in misquoting sources in order to make them say precisely the opposite of what the authors intended is nothing short of reprehensible,<sup>9</sup> but unfortunately it represents the misinformation all too often encountered on the internet.<sup>10</sup>

This is not to negate the fact that some modern scholars do consider the tripartite phrase of Matthew 28:19 to be a "later interpolation." For instance, Bultmann writes:

The one baptizing names over the one being baptized the name of "the Lord Jesus Christ," later expanded to the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (first attested in Did. 7:1, 3, Justin Apol. 61:3, 11, 13; also found in Mt. 28:19, but this is perhaps a case of later interpolation).<sup>11</sup>

Others have followed him in suggesting that the tripartite phrase was added to the explicit words (*ipsis-sima verba*) of Yeshua. But we should be careful not to confuse the viewpoint that the tripartite phrase is a "later interpolation" with the idea that the phrase was not original in Matthew's Gospel but was added in the later centuries. Some of those who consider the possibility of a "later interpolation" mean that Matthew himself interpolated the words of Yeshua, and that the tripartite phrase is original to the Gospel. Likewise, what has caused many to suspect the tripartite phrase in Matthew 28:19 is that they are considering it a "baptismal formula," that is, the prescribed liturgical words required to be said at a baptism. When our text is considered as a baptismal formula, it stands against the consistently used baptismal formula found in Acts and the Epistles, which is that one is baptized "in(to) the name of Yeshua" or "in(to) Yeshua Messiah" or some near equivalent (e.g., Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; cf. Rom 6:3). But there is no clear reason to presume that Matthew is giving us a "baptismal formula." Note the remarks of Carson:

Many deny the authenticity of this Trinitarian formula, however, not on the basis of doubtful reconstructions of the development of doctrine, but on the basis of the fact that the only evidence we have of actual Christian baptisms indicates a consistent monadic formula baptism in Jesus' name (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; similarly, passages such as Rom 6:3). If Jesus gave the Trinitarian formula, why was it shortened? Is it not easier to believe that the Trinitarian formula was a relatively late development? But certain reflections give us pause.

1. It is possible, though historically improbable, that the full Trinitarian formula was used for pagan converts, and "in the name of Jesus" for Jews and proselytes. But this is doubtful, not least because Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, never uses a Trinitarian formula for baptism.
2. Trinitarian ideas are found in the resurrection accounts of both Luke and John even if these evangelists do not report the Trinitarian baptismal formula. The faith to be proclaimed was in some sense Trinitarian from the beginning. "This conclusion should not come as a great surprise: the Trinitarian tendencies of the early church are most easily explained if they go back to Jesus Himself; but the importance of the point for our study is that it means that Matthew's reference to the Trinity in chapter 28 is not a white elephant tho-

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8. J. C. Lambert, "Sacraments" in James Orr, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1915).

9. A number of other similar deceptions are part of Willis' internet page on Matt 28:19, but the few listed here should give the reader sufficient pause in relying upon anything this author presents.

10. One need only search the internet for "Matthew 28:19" to see the manner in which irresponsible misinformation and malicious deception has been multiplied upon unsuspecting readers. Such a state of affairs should strengthen our resolve to accept conclusions only when we have verified the sources.

11. Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 2 vols (Scribners, 1951), 1.133–34.

roughly out of context” (D. Wenham, “Resurrection,” p. 53).

3. The term “formula” is tripping us up. There is no evidence we have Jesus’ *ipsissima verba* here and still less that the church regarded Jesus’ command as a baptismal formula, a liturgical form the ignoring of which was a breach of canon law. The problem has too often been cast in anachronistic terms. E. Riggenbach (*Der Trinitarische Taufbefehl* Matt. 28:19 [Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1901]) points out that as late as the *Didache*, baptism in the name of Jesus and baptism in the name of the Trinity coexist side by side: the church was not bound by precise “formulas” and felt no embarrassment at a multiplicity of them, precisely because Jesus’ instruction, which may not have been in these precise words, was not regarded as a binding formula.<sup>12</sup>

It is not uncommon to hear the notion that the tripartite phrase in Matthew 28:19 is suspect on text critical grounds, but when one consults the data itself, such claims are entirely unfounded. Every extant Greek biblical manuscript that contains this verse of Matthew has the tripartite phrase.<sup>13</sup> One would expect that if, indeed, Matthew’s original (whether one presumes a Greek or Hebrew original, or both) did not include the tripartite phrase, that at least some early witnesses to this original would have remained. But not one single witness, early or late, gives evidence that 28:19 ever existed without the tripartite phrase. When we look at the versions the same situation obtains. The Syriac Peshitta (in all of its extant witnesses), the Vulgate, the Coptic, the Slovak versions—all have the tripartite phrase. Plummer’s conclusion is therefore warranted:

It is incredible that an interpolation of this character can have been made in the text of Mt. without leaving a trace of its unauthenticity in a single MS. or Version. The evidence for its genuineness is overwhelming.<sup>14</sup>

Some, like George Howard,<sup>15</sup> seek to use the text of the Shem Tov (Even Bohan) Matthew to suggest that the original text of Matthew did not contain the tripartite phrase. Matthew 28:19 reads as follows in the Shem Tov Matthew:

לכו אתם ושמרו [ולמדו] אותם לקיים כל הדברים אשר ציויתי אתכם עד עולם  
the words which I commanded you forever.”

Howard suggests the possibility that this shorter ending of Matthew’s Gospel may reflect a text which Eusebius also had. In the course of the article, Howard refers to a well known article by F. C. Conybeare (“The Eusebian Form of the Text Matth. 28, 19” *ZNW* 2 [1901], 275–88) which purports to give evidence for the later addition of the tripartite phrase.<sup>16</sup> He also references a *logion* accredited to Yeshua in a medieval Muslim text<sup>17</sup> which some thought paralleled a short ending for Matthew. David Flusser also

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12. D. A. Carson, “Matthew” in Frank Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* 12 vols. (Zondervan, 1990), 8.598.

13. That such is the case may be seen by the fact that Bart Ehrman in his *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (Oxford, 1993) does not mention anything about the textual corruption of Matt 28:19 for the obvious reason that no textual variants exist in the Greek manuscripts regarding the tripartite phrase. Since it is his purpose in this work to show that the christological debates of the later centuries introduced theologically driven variants to enter the text, had any such variants existed for Matthew 28:19, he doubtlessly would have included them.

14. Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (James Family Reprint, n.d.), p. 432.

15. George Howard, “A Note on the Short Ending of Matthew.” *HTR* 81 (1988) 117–20. Also note his remarks to this effect in *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Mercer, 1995), pp. 192–194.

16. This article, however, was amply refuted by E. Riggenbach (*Der Trinitarische Taufbefehl* Matt. 28:19 [Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1901]) who showed that the *Didache* used both a short and tripartite liturgical formula (cf. 7.1, 3; 9.3; 10.2).

17. Shlomo Pines, *The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source*, Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities 2/13 (Jerusalem: Central Press, 1966).

felt this might be the case.<sup>18</sup> However, a number of scholars responded quite negatively to these claims, offering substantial evidence to the contrary.<sup>19</sup> Given the large textual discrepancies between the Shem Tov Matthew and all other known manuscripts of the Gospel, and while we may applaud Howard's efforts to show possible "ancient readings" embedded in the Shem Tov text, it hardly seems warranted to use this 14th Century source for text critical issues unless the variant readings it offers show some corroborative evidence from other manuscripts. Additionally, the other two Hebrew Matthews (du Tillet and Münster) both contain the tripartite phrase in Matthew 28:19.

This brings us to the one piece of evidence most often cited by those who contend that the tripartite phrase in Matthew 28:19 is a later addition motivated by trinitarian concerns of the later Christian Church: the quotes or allusions to this text in the writings of Eusebius. As noted above, Eusebius quotes or alludes to Matthew 28:19 with the words "make disciples of all the nations in My name." This is found a number of times in his *Ecclesiastical History*,<sup>20</sup> but there is more that needs to be said. First, Eusebius did know of the tripartite phrase in Matthew 28:19. In his Letter to the Church of Caesarea we read his confession of faith in light of the Council of Nicea:

We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in One Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, Light from Light, Life from Life, Son Only-begotten, first-born of every creature, before all the ages, begotten from the Father, by whom also all things were made; who for our salvation was made flesh, and lived among men, and suffered, and rose again the third day, and ascended to the Father, and will come again in glory to judge quick and dead, And we believe also in One Holy Ghost; believing each of These to be and to exist, the Father truly Father, and the Son truly Son, and the Holy Ghost truly Holy Ghost, as also our Lord, sending forth His disciples for the preaching, said, Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Concerning whom we confidently affirm that so we hold, and so we think, and so we have held aforetime, and we maintain this faith unto the death, anathematizing every godless heresy. That this we have ever thought from our heart and soul, from the time we recollect ourselves, and now think and say in truth, before God Almighty and our Lord Jesus Christ do we witness, being able by proofs to show and to convince you, that, even in times past, such has been our belief and preaching.<sup>21</sup> (emphasis mine)

Secondly, the times that Eusebius does quote or allude to Matthew 28:19 without reference to the tripartite phrase are in contexts where his primary object is to show the necessity of making disciples in general, quoting only that part of Matthew 28:19 that fits his immediate purpose. That he does include the tripartite phrase in the context of a confession shows that he was aware of its presence in Matthew's text.

Thirdly, why are the quotes from Eusebius that leave off the tripartite phrase considered of greater weight than other Church Fathers who quote or allude to the text with the phrase? We may note the words of Justin (c. 100–165) in *1 Apol.* 61.3:

they then perform the bath in the water, in the name of the Father of the universe and of our Savior Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit.

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18. David Flusser, "The Conclusion of Matthew in a New Jewish-Christian Source," *ASTI* 5(1967), 110–20.

19. See Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Op. cit., p. 193, n. 37.

20. e.g., *Ecc. Hist.* III.5.ii; X.16.viii. Davies and Allison (*Matthew in The International Critical Commentary*, 3 vols [T&T Clark, 1997], 3.684, n. 41) indicate that Eusebius' allusions to or quotes of Matthew 28:19 in this fashion occur 16 times. However, B. J. Hubbard (*The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning*, SBLDS 19, [Missoula, 1974], pp. 151–75) shows Eusebius' habit "of quoting the NT inexactly and of combining or at least grouping in close proximity passages which relate in some way to each other."

21. Document E in *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus* (Baker Book House, 1955), Appendix on the Council of Nice, p. 43ff.

Though this is not a quote of the Matthew text, it certainly incorporates the same three names in the context of baptism. However, Ignatius (c. 35–107) clearly quotes our text in his Epistle to the Philadelphians, ix:

For those things which the prophets announced, saying, “Until He come for whom it is reserved, and He shall be the expectation of the Gentiles,” (Gen 49:10) have been fulfilled in the Gospel, [our Lord saying, ] “Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” (Matt 28:19) All then are good together, the law, the prophets, the apostles, the whole company [of others] that have believed through them: only if we love one another.

Irenaeus (c. 130–200) likewise quotes Matthew 28:19 with the tripartite phrase in his *Against Heresies*:

And again, giving to the disciples the power of regeneration into God, He said to them, “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” (section xvii)

Note Tertullian (c. 160–225) as well:

Accordingly, after one of these had been struck off, He commanded the eleven others, on His departure to the Father, to “go and teach all nations, who were to be baptized into the Father, and into the Son, and into the Holy Ghost.” (*The Prescription Against Heretics*, xx)

We should also reckon with the fact that the *Didache* contains the tripartite phrase:

1 Now concerning baptism, baptize as follows: after you have reviewed all these things, baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” in running water. 2 But if you have no running water, then baptize in some other water; and if you are not able to baptize in cold water, then do so in warm. 3 But if you have neither, then pour water on the head three times “in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. (*Didache* 7:1–3)

A number of *Didache* scholars do not believe it quotes Matthew at this point, but that both the *Didache* and Matthew rely upon a common tradition.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, while the date of the *Didache* is debated, most scholars would put it between 90 and 120 CE with some suggesting an even earlier date. It therefore exists as an early witness to the tripartite phrase in connection with baptism, just as we have it in Matthew 28:19.

Given these data, it seems strange that the references to our text by Eusebius, leaving out the tripartite phrase, are given so much attention, especially since Eusebius lived c. 260–340 CE, well after the witness to the text of Matthew 28:19 by the earlier Church Fathers noted above. Even if his *Ecclesiastical History* relied upon earlier sources, there is nothing directly to substantiate the notion that he had in his possession an early copy of Matthew’s Gospel that left off the tripartite formula. Further, the fact that Eusebius’ style of quoting sources has been characterized as often “inexact” should caution us in giving too much weight to his allusions or quotations of Matthew 28:19.

We may also inquire into the work of commentators on Matthew’s Gospel. Do the majority of modern commentators hold that the tripartite phrase of Matthew 28:19 is spurious to the Gospel itself and was added in the later centuries? It is not uncommon to hear that such is the case, but one is hard pressed

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22. See Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache in Hermeneia* (Fortress, 1998), pp. 126–27, and p. 126, n. 11; Willy Rordorf, “Baptism According to the Didache” in Jonathan A. Draper, ed., *The Didache in Modern Research* (Brill, 1996), pp. 217–18.

to prove it. Besides the quotes given above from Tasker, Hagner, Carson, and Plummer, note the following excerpts from other well known commentaries on Matthew:

Christian baptism in Acts is also ‘in[to] the name of’, but it is always ‘in[to] the name of Jesus’ or some equivalent. In Paul, baptism is ‘into Christ [Jesus]’. Matthew’s ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’ is quite distinctive. It is the Matthean use that predominated in later Christian baptismal practice. And this seems to have had a distorting effect on the understanding of Matthew’s words. We cannot know whether the Matthean church used the words formulaically in baptism or not. But given the variations in NT language, clearly there was no agreed baptismal formula. And I think it unlikely that Matthew is reflecting the language of baptismal practice. In any case, our first task must be to understand the language in its present Matthean context and not in some putative context in baptismal practice. A large number of scholars have pronounced Matthew’s language to be a foreign body in Matthew, but this judgment seems to be derived ultimately from reading the language in relation to a (later) baptismal context and not in relation to the Gospel. My concern is to seek to understand the Matthean language in the Matthean context.<sup>23</sup>

Jesus goes on to speak of baptizing these new disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This expression has caused endless controversy among exegetes. There are two separate problems, the institution of baptism as a rite of initiation for disciples, and the use of the Trinitarian formula. On the former question it is pointed out that Jesus did not habitually engage in baptism as John the Baptist, for example, did. Throughout his ministry he did not call on his followers to baptize those who wished to become adherents. From this it is argued that baptism was a rite established by the church, and the command to continue it is viewed as having been read back onto the lips of Jesus. But against this is the fact that baptism was part of church life from the very first. On the Day of Pentecost Peter preached to the crowd in Jerusalem, and when they asked, “What shall we do, brother men?” he responded without consultation and without hesitation, “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:37–38). We have no knowledge of a time when the church was without baptism or unsure of baptism. It is difficult to explain this apart from a definite command of Jesus.

The words referring to the Trinity are another matter, but we must bear in mind that the faith mentioned in verse 18 “naturally issues in the concept of the Trinity” (Johnson). We must bear in mind as well that in the early church there are references to baptizing in the name of Jesus (e.g., Acts 8:16; 19:5). Bonnard notices this difficulty, but immediately adds, “one cannot doubt that the Trinitarian formula was already there in germ in Paul” (p. 416; similarly Allen remarks, “the conception Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is clearly as ancient as the Christian Society itself”). Such passages, however, may not give the formula used in baptizing, but be a short way of differentiating Christian baptism from the other baptisms in the ancient world.<sup>24</sup>

εἰς τὸ ὄνομα κ.τ.λ. can mean ‘in the name of the Father and the name of the Son and the name of the Holy Spirit’ (cf. Justin, *1 Apol.* 61). The difficulty with this, however, is that one might then expect τὰ ὀνόματα. The alternative is to suppose that the one divine name—the revealed name of power (Exod 3.13–15; Prov 8.10; Jub. 36.7)—has been shared by the Father with Jesus and the Spirit, and there are early texts which speak of the Father giving his name to Jesus (Jn 17.11; Phil 2.9; *Gos. Truth* 38.5–15). But we are unaware of comparable texts regarding the Spirit.

We see no developed Trinitarianism in the First Gospel. But certainly later interpreters found in the baptismal formulation an implicit equality among Father, Son and Holy Spirit; so for instance Basil the Great, *Hom. Spir.* 10.24; 17.43<sup>25</sup>

*Father, ...Son, ...Holy Spirit.* If we approach this verse with a fully developed post-Nicene orthodoxy in our minds, we shall be just as sympathetic to our sources as are those who find in this verse a highly sophisticated and much later stage of doctrinal formulation retrojected into the text. For all we know, such a saying

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23. John Nolland, *Matthew* in Marshall and Hagner, eds., *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2005), p. 1268.

24. Leon Morris, *Matthew* in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1992), ad loc, Matthew 28:19.

25. W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew* 3 vols in *The International Critical Commentary* (T&T Clark, 1997), 3.685–86.

may have stood in the now-lost ending of Mark. Even apart from such speculation, the concept of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is clearly as old as the Messianic Community as it is known to us in the New Testament. Cf., for example, 1Cor 12:4–6; 2Cor 13:14; 1Pet 1:2; 1Jn 3:23–24. In Mark we have “Father” and “Son” so obviously antithetical that—allowing for Jewish beliefs about “the Spirit”—it plainly opened the way to trinitarian belief. The antithesis Father-Son is found in Matt 26:27 and is very common in John. But what is also common in John is the emphasis on the Paraclete, clearly represented as being neither Father nor Son.

It seems plain from the early material in Acts that baptism was performed “in the name of” and also “into the name of” Jesus as Lord and Messiah. The mistake of so many writers on the New Testament lies in treating this saying as a liturgical formula (which it later became), and not as a description of what baptism accomplished. The evangelist, whom we must at least allow to have been familiar with the baptismal customs of the early Messianic Community, may well have added to *baptizing them* his own summary of what baptism accomplished.

It is as well to remember that the *Didache* also has this summary of baptism (*Didache* vii) and its reference to “running water” reflects an earlier Essene preoccupation.<sup>26</sup>

To these may be added the comments of Rudolf Schnackenburg (*The Gospel of Matthew*), H. A. W. Meyer (*Commentary on the New Testament*, Willoughby Allen (original *Matthew* in the ICC), J. P. Lange (*Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical Commentary on the New Testament*), Adam Clarke (*The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*), J. B. Lightfoot (*A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*), A. B. Bruce (*Expositor’s Greek Testament*), Henry Alford (*The Greek Testament*), all of whom affirm the tripartite phrase as original to Matthew’s Gospel. We may add to these commentators remarks in various works by other scholars: Eckhard Schnabel (*Early Christian Mission*), N. T. Wright (*The Resurrection of the Son of God*), Jacob Van Bruggen (*Jesus the Son of God*), Kurt Niederwimmer (*The Didache* [Hermeneia]), James D. G. Dunn (*Christology in the Making*), Simon Gathercole (*The Pre-existent Son*), and the list could go on.

The question, then, is how the tripartite phrase could be suspect as spurious in the first place? Since there is not one scrap of manuscript evidence to suggest any variants in regard to the phrase, nor do any of the early versions exclude it; since a number of the early Church Fathers quote the verse with the tripartite phrase; and since Eusebius, who does quote a shorter version, also quotes the full version with the phrase, we have no real reason to question its authenticity. It would appear that those who do question its authenticity do so on the grounds that (1) it represents a trinitarian baptismal formula which developed later, in the 2nd Century or beyond, and (2) the consistent baptismal formula in Acts does employ the name of Yeshua alone. But we have shown that there is no necessity to see a “baptismal formula” in Matthew 28:19, nor some kind of developed “trinitarianism,” notwithstanding that some have tried to read these later developments back into the text.

But this is not the heart of the issue. Assessments of whether a given text is authentic or not should be made on the extant manuscript evidence, not on one’s theological presumptions or propensities. Those who find themselves opposed to the later trinitarian doctrines formulated by the Christian Church may easily suspect Matthew 28:19 of saying something it actually does not. Reading the text with anti-trinitarian glasses hampers objectivity. As noted above, there is no reason to think that Matthew’s tripartite phrase flows from a developed trinitarianism. The juxtapositioning of titles such as “Father” or “God” with “Son” or “Yeshua/Messiah” and “Spirit” or “Holy Spirit” is common in the Apostolic Scriptures. We may note the following by way of example:

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26. W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* in Albright and Freedman, eds. *The Anchor Bible* (Doubleday, 1971), pp. 362–63.



1Cor. 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

2Cor. 13:14 The grace of the Lord Yeshua Messiah, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Eph. 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

2Th. 2:13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

14 It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Yeshua Messiah.

1Pet. 1:2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Yeshua Messiah and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

Furthermore, it seems highly probable that the Pauline texts quoted above were all written at a time roughly contemporary with (or perhaps even prior to) the writing of the Gospels. This being the case, we should not be overly concerned to find “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” in Matthew’s text, as though to do so requires some kind of explanation. Surely the philosophical and ontological trinitarian formulations appeared centuries later than the writing of Matthew’s Gospel, but the acknowledgment of the Father and Son relationship taught by Yeshua Himself, along with the present, active work of the Spirit, certainly was an early phenomenon among the disciples of our Master. Therefore, for Matthew to record the words of Yeshua that commissioned His disciples to baptize Gentile believers “into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” must, at the minimum, mean that such Gentile believers were to acknowledge their new relationship with the God of Israel, obtained through the coming of His Son as Messiah, and made real or powerful through the inner working of the Spirit. If we can read Matthew’s words without imposing upon them the christological debates of the later centuries, we can accept them at face value without having to find some supposed textual reason to dismiss them.