

## **Item #110 (Legitimacy Again)**

**In Item #37 above** I discussed the relevance of “legitimacy” for the Gospels. The occurrence of the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus on January 8, 2024, was the occasion for reminding me of the importance of legitimacy. The homilist for the Mass, for which I was one of a number of concelebrants, mentioned that years before, on the occasion of the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus, that he had been asked by one of the faithful why Jesus had to be baptized, since He was obviously sinless. He said that he had answered this question by saying that Jesus was baptized so that He could *forgive* sins, not so that He could *be forgiven* sins.

A study of the texts where the baptism of Jesus is presented (*Matthew* 3,13-17; *Mark* 1,9-11; *Luke* 3,21-22; *John* 1,29-34) reveals something different. In all four accounts the Spirit of God together with a heavenly voice identifies Jesus as “Son”. This, it would seem, was the reason for the baptism of Jesus. Jesus as divine needed no identification, but Jesus as human did. The voices serve to identify Jesus and thus to legitimize him in the eyes of men. And subsequent use of baptism for those designated as authorized to reproduce this baptism of Jesus on those who were only human is thus a means of putting them legitimately in contact with the Christian God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And thus a supposition underlying the baptism narratives in all four Gospels is “justification”: the practice of baptism is justified. If one reads the four Gospels as a whole, one is led to conclude that baptism was a practice common to Christians of the time. And thus “Tradition”, a reality independent of “Scripture” but demanded by it if its intelligibility is to be safeguarded, is understood. **(James Swetnam, S.J., January 10, 2024)**