

The Baptismal Formula Debate: A Biblical and Historical Investigation

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Prior to His ascension into heaven, Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). And yet, when the disciples performed baptisms, we never find them baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Instead, the Acts of the Apostles repeatedly describes people as being baptized in the name of Jesus (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). Certain texts in the epistles seem to presuppose baptism in the name of Jesus as well (Romans 6:1-1; 1 Corinthians 1:12-13; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:11; James 2:7).¹ Why the difference? While non-Christians and liberal Christians may explain it as just another example of a Biblical contradiction, that option is not available to Christians who subscribe to a conservative Bibliology. There must be some way to reconcile the data, but how?

It seems to me that there are four viable options for reconciling the data:

1. Scripture does not prescribe any baptismal formula (silent baptism)
2. The proper baptismal formula is the triune formula found in Matthew
3. The proper baptismal formula is the Jesus’ name formula found in Acts
4. Both the triune and Jesus’ name formulas are acceptable baptismal formulas, and can be used interchangeably

Let me flesh out each option in a bit more detail:

1. Jesus never intended for us to use a baptismal formula at all; i.e. He never intended for the baptizer to say anything over the baptizand during baptism. Neither “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (INFSHS) nor “in the name of Jesus Christ” (INJC) are meant to be repeated during baptism. They simply describe the authority by which we baptize, or the kind of baptism being performed (Christian).
2. Jesus intended for us to use INFSHS as the baptismal formula. INJC is not a baptismal formula, but a description of the kind of baptism being performed (Christian). It’s a shorthand way of referring to the longer formula provided by Jesus in Matthew 28:19, or perhaps a way of communicating that those who are baptized INFSHS are spiritually joined to Jesus.
3. Jesus intended for us to use INJC as the baptismal formula. INFSHS is not a baptismal formula at all, but a way of communicating to us the authority by which we are to baptize.
4. Jesus intended for us to use both INFSHS and INJC as baptismal formulas. They are variants of each other and communicate the same essential message, and thus either (or both) can be used as a legitimate baptismal formula.

To determine the most viable option, we need to look at both the Biblical and historical evidence. Everyone agrees that the Biblical data matters, but why should we concern ourselves with the historical data? History is not an authority, yet alone an authority on par with Scripture. However, history is a source of evidence regarding what the post-apostolic church believed and practiced, and evidence should not be ignored. We would naturally expect that the earliest sources in the post-apostolic age would reflect the baptismal practices of the first century. History, then, can be used as a check on our

¹Or some similar variant such as “the name of the Lord” or “the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Biblical interpretation. If our Biblical interpretation is reflected in the practices of the early post-apostolic church, that would generally serve to confirm our Biblical interpretation. If however, the historical data does not reflect our interpretation, then this may indicate that our Biblical interpretation is incorrect. At the very least, it would require an explanation as to why the historical record is incongruent with our Biblical interpretation. Having said that, we must also consider the fact that the post-apostolic church shows evidence of introducing new traditions and evolving certain doctrines in a very short period of time. That's why the historical record needs to be considered, but should not be elevated above the Biblical data.

Having said this, we would naturally expect for the apostolic tradition to continue on in at least some areas of the church, and thus expect a record of that tradition in the extant writings of the church fathers as well as a record of bishops debating differences in baptismal practice (as they did on many topics). For example, if the apostles did not use any baptismal formula, we would expect to see evidence of some churches using baptismal formulas while others do not, and debates among the bishops as to whether a formula was necessary. If the apostles used the INFSHS formula, we would naturally expect for the historical record to reveal when and why some Christians started using the Jesus' name formula instead. If the apostles used the Jesus' name formula, we would naturally expect for the historical record to reveal when and why some Christians started using the INFSHS formula instead. Finally, if the apostles used both INFSHS and INJC as baptismal formulas, history should reveal some bishops teaching this apostolic practice and debating those who taught that only one or the other was acceptable.

I'll begin with the Biblical data first, followed by the historical evidence. In the Biblical evidence section, I will present what I consider to be the best arguments for and against each of the four options. I will argue for each position as if it were my own, and then argue against each position as if I opposed it. Then, I will provide a rating for how likely I find each of the four options to be in light of the arguments, pro and con. The rating sections will reveal my own personal assessment of the arguments for and against each option.

The rating scale will range from one to five, with "1" being very unlikely, "2" being somewhat unlikely, "3" being possible, "4" being somewhat likely, and "5" being very likely. I will rate the Biblical data and the historical data independently, as if each source of evidence were the only source of evidence we had on the matter. This means my rating of the Biblical evidence may not match my rating of the historical evidence. Then, at the end of this paper, I will draw some conclusions as to which of the four options is most likely correct based on a combination of both the Biblical and historical evidence.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

There Is No Baptismal Formula

Baptism is silent, by which I mean there is no baptismal formula invoked by the baptizer over the baptizand during baptism. Scripture does not provide us with, and did not intend for us to use a baptismal formula. Two arguments can be advanced in favor of this view: Hebrew name theology, logical inconsistency. Each of these arguments will be explored below.

Hebrew Name Theology

Argument

In Western culture, one's name has little significance. We choose a name based on its phonetic appeal, and use names simply to distinguish one person from another. In Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) culture, a name has much more significance. One's name is equivalent to the person himself, representing their person or presence, signifying their worth, character, reputation, authority, will, and ownership.² This perspective is often referred to as "Hebrew name theology" (HNT). Doing something "in the name of person X" always has a meaning. It refers to person X himself, his presence, his power, his authority, his character, his reputation, his will, his ownership, etc. So whenever we read about doing something "in the name of X," it's going to entail one or more of these ideas. In many cases, in addition to having a meaning, doing something "in the name of person X" also requires the verbal or written invocation of a person's name. The important point to note, however, is that it does not always require this. In some cases, no verbal invocation is expected, or even possible.

Let's look at the Old Testament data first. YHWH said He has "chosen him out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons for all time" (Deuteronomy 18:5). There is no indication that every time a priest began a day of ministry in the Tabernacle, he orally invoked the name of YHWH. The point is simply that God has chosen Aaron and invested him with the authority to do priestly duties. Aaron is not exercising those rites in his own authority, but in the authority of YHWH.

When Elijah repaired the altar of YHWH during his Carmel showdown with the prophets of Baal, it is said that "with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord" (1 Kings 18:32). Clearly, the meaning is that Elijah built it for YHWH. It belongs to YHWH. It's for YHWH's service. We don't read of Elijah pronouncing the name of YHWH while building it. One could counter that Elijah would have consecrated the altar by pronouncing the name of YHWH over it after it was built. Possibly, but the text never makes that claim, so one would be arguing from silence. The only time we see Elijah calling on the name of YHWH was when he addressed Him personally in a prayer (vs. 36-37). There is no connection between his prayer and the building of the altar, such that his prayer should be interpreted as the verbal invocation involved in building the altar (which was already complete prior to the prayer).

Isaiah said, "Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God" (Isaiah 50:10). Isaiah isn't telling people to say the name of YHWH to indicate they trust Him. He's simply telling them to trust in the person of YHWH.

Micah wrote, "For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever" (Micah 4:5). Micah isn't talking about pronouncing the name of YHWH, but about living according to the commands of YHWH.

We see similar examples in the New Testament (NT). In Colossians 3:17, Paul instructed the church that "whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Does anyone think that when we drive our car we should begin our drive by saying, "In the name of Jesus?" Or should we say "in the name of Jesus" when we brush our teeth?

²For more information on the Biblical significance of a "name," see my article titled "The Biblical Significance of Names" found at www.onenesspentecostal.com/names.htm

Obviously not. We understand this command in light of HNT. Paul's point was that we are to live our lives as unto Jesus Christ Himself, acknowledging Him in all we do, living in accordance with His character, purpose, and will. He did not intend for us to verbally pronounce the name of Jesus for everything we do, otherwise we would be saying "in Jesus' name" hundreds or thousands of times each day.

A similar example is Jesus' teaching on prayer. He told us to make our prayer requests in His name (John 14:13; see also 14:14; 15:16; 16:23-24). Jesus could not have meant for us to literally end our prayers with the phrase "in Jesus' name" since no NT prayer ended this way (see Acts 4:24-30; Ephesians 1:17-23; Revelation 22:20). The name of Jesus is not even mentioned in all of the recorded prayers. Jesus' point was not that we verbally invoke His name in every prayer, but that we should pray in accordance with Christ's will, character, and authority – praying as if we were Jesus Himself.

Finally, the Jewish leadership told the apostles "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18; see also Acts 5:40; 9:27-28). Their concern was not that the apostles were naming the name of Jesus in their teaching (Jesus was a very common name), but with the *content* of their teaching. They did not want the apostles to teach the people *about* Jesus.

In light of HNT, it is quite plausible that when Jesus said to baptize disciples INFSHS, or when we read about people being baptized INJC, these should not be interpreted to mean that we are to verbally invoke the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or the name of Jesus Christ over the baptizand during baptism. They could be Hebrew linguistic devices employed to describe the *type* of baptism in view (Christian baptism), the authority on which we perform baptism, and/or the *purpose* for such baptism (to join one to the Father, Son, and Spirit, or alternatively, to join one to Jesus). If INFSHS and INJC were never meant to be understood as baptismal formulas, then the whole debate over the triune vs. Jesus' name formula becomes a moot point.

The careful reader of Scripture will also observe that we are never told what, if anything, the apostles *said* during the act of baptism; we are only told what the apostles *did*.³ Acts describes people being baptized in the name of Jesus, but it does not record what was said *during* their baptisms. When the text says they were baptized INJC, it could just be a *description* of the type of baptism being performed; i.e. Christian baptism. It was distinctly Christian because people were being spiritually united with the person of Jesus Christ by the act of baptism. For Luke to record that people were baptized INJC, then, is merely a declarative statement to his hearers intended to distinguish Christian baptism from the other forms of baptisms current in their day, and/or to explain the purpose of Christian baptism.

Counter-Argument

The observation that Scripture never records what was actually said during baptism is a valid observation, but it does not follow that this means they did not use a baptismal formula. Much can be said in favor of HNT as well. It graces the whole of Scripture. I would agree that INFSHS/INJC serve to distinguish the act of baptism as uniquely Christian, as well as to elucidate the purpose of such baptism. However, this does not preclude the oral invocation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or name of Jesus Christ during baptism. Hebrew name theology only demonstrates that not all instances of doing

³While Luke records Peter telling people to be baptized INJC in Acts 2:38 and 10:48, he does so prior to them being baptized. His words were instructional. He was clearly not using INJC as a baptismal formula at the time because he uttered the words prior to baptizing anyone.

something “in the name of person X” require a verbal invocation of that person’s name. But one must provide good reasons for thinking that is the case with baptism. It does not follow from the mere observation that not all instances of doing something “in the name of” require a verbal invocation that baptism “in the name of” does not require a verbal invocation (a baptismal formula).

The baptismal references appear to be formulaic in nature. Unlike prayer, we regularly find the phrase “INJC” connected to the act of baptism in Acts, as though Luke is hearkening back to what was said at baptism – even though he is not recording the precise words of the baptizer. If it is not intended as a formula, why did Luke repeatedly connect the phrase to baptismal reports but not to other acts of the apostles? If “INJC” only served as a literary device to inform Luke’s readers concerning the type and purpose of the baptisms he was recounting, why use it more than once? Indeed, why even use it once? It’s clear from the context that the baptisms were Christian baptisms. Luke’s repetitive use of this phrase would make more sense if he was recording the details surrounding these baptisms, one of which was the use of a verbal baptismal formula.

Baptisms of various sorts were somewhat common in first-century Israel,⁴ so it’s true that INFSH/INJC could be used literarily to clarify the type of baptism in view. However, that same need to distinguish Christian baptism from other forms of baptism argues equally well for the verbal use of INFSHS/INJC as a baptismal formula. If there is a need to distinguish Christian baptism from other forms of baptism in literature, then surely there is a need to distinguish Christian baptism from other forms of baptism in practice; i.e. when performing the baptisms.

The pericope in Acts 19:1-7 also argues for a baptismal formula. When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he found 12 disciples of John the Baptist. When Paul asked them whether they had received the Holy Spirit, they replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2). Upon hearing this, Paul asked them how they were baptized, to which they answered, “Into John’s baptism” (19:3). While more than 20 years had passed since Jesus had risen from the dead, and a few more since John had been killed, these Johannine disciples had never heard of Jesus. Their knowledge extended only to John the Baptist’s preaching in the Judean desert. Apparently they left Judah after being baptized by John but before the start of Jesus’ ministry. Paul went on to explain that John’s baptism was merely a pointer to, and preparation for the Messiah (19:4). When they heard this they were water baptized and filled with the Spirit (19:5-6).

A few points can be made from this passage. First, Paul saw John’s baptism as insufficient for followers of Jesus. A rebaptism was needed.

Second, Paul believed Christian baptism was part of the solution to their spiritual problem. That’s why, upon hearing that they had not received the Holy Spirit, he immediately asked how they were baptized. Apparently he saw baptism as logically and/or causally related to the baptism of the Spirit.

Third, Paul clearly saw a difference between John’s baptism and Christian baptism, but what exactly would distinguish the two? If both Christian and Johannine baptism involved confession of sins with immersion in water, how were they different? Why rebaptize these Johannine disciples if their Christian baptism is the same as their former baptism? If Christian baptism did not differ from John’s baptism in

⁴Certain Jews practiced dippings for ritual cleansing. Also, rabbis commonly baptized their pupils in their own name. Paul alluded to this practice in 1 Corinthians 1:13. If the rabbis uttered their own name over their pupils, Christians uttering the name of Jesus Christ over their new disciples would clearly distinguish Christian baptism from Jewish baptism.

its form, why did Paul see John's baptism as insufficient for those professing faith in Christ? What else, except a baptismal formula invoking the name of the Father/Son/Holy Spirit or the name of Jesus, could have distinguished the two forms of baptism and made their rebaptism essential? While the object of faith in Christian baptism would be different, the external form of baptism itself would be the same.⁵ I find it difficult to conceive of anything more likely to distinguish John's baptism from Christian baptism than a baptismal formula.

While the data in Acts is directional, pointing toward the use of a baptismal formula, James 2:7 is a bit more explicit. In his short epistle, James asked, "Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?" (James 2:7) The Greek word translated "called," *epiklethen*, is passive in voice. The verse is better translated as "Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name that was called over you?" James seems to have a specific event in mind – an event that all of his readers would have shared. When would the name of Jesus Christ be invoked over someone? The most likely reference is to their baptism. Some modern Bibles, whose goal is to make the meaning of Scripture clearer to the reader, render James 2:7 as a reference to baptism:

- **The Message:** Aren't they the ones who scorn the new name – "Christian" – used in your baptisms?
- **Amplified Bible:** Is it not they who slander and blaspheme that precious name by which you are distinguished and called [the name of Christ invoked in baptism]?

If James is referring to baptism, this would indicate that the name of Jesus was verbally invoked by a third party over the baptizand, which is tantamount to a baptismal formula.

Paul also had something to say that contributes to this debate. While discussing the factions in the church of Corinth, he asked, "What I mean is that each one of you says 'I follow Paul,' or 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas,' or 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul" (1 Corinthians 1:12-13)? Paul is likely appealing to the practice of Jewish rabbis who baptized their pupils in their own name to signify that they were disciples of that rabbi. Paul's line of reasoning seems to be, "You weren't baptized in my name, and therefore you aren't my disciples. You are the disciples of the one whose name you were baptized into: Father/Son/Spirit or Jesus." If being baptized INFSHS/INJC is just a literary way of clarifying that one is speaking of Christian baptism, why would Paul need to do so here? Would there be any confusion on the part of the Corinthians regarding the baptism to which Paul referred? Of course not. It would be similar to me asking a fellow Christian, "Did you go to Christian church last night?" There is no need to add the clarifying adjective "Christian" to "church" when speaking to a Christian. It's obvious to both of us that when we speak of "church," we are referring to a Christian church. Likewise, when speaking to Christians regarding their baptism, there is no need to clarify that we are talking about Christian baptism. Paul was not making a literary clarification, but referring to a historical event in which the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit or the name of Jesus was invoked over them in baptism.

⁵If only the object of faith differs, then so long as they came to believe on Jesus, why would they need to be rebaptized? Why not consider them already baptized, but merely lacking faith in Jesus, such that once they gained faith in Jesus, their experience would be complete? Why the need to get baptized again?

Logically Inconsistent in Light of Acts 2:38

Argument

If we take the Biblical reports of people being baptized INJC to mean that we must literally say “INJC” over them as they are being baptized, then we must pronounce the name of Jesus over those who repent as well. After all, in Acts 2:38 Peter said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The acts of repentance and baptism are connected by the conjunction “and,” indicating that both are to be done in the name of Jesus. If INJC is meant to be a verbal baptismal formula, then we must also understand it as a verbal repentance formula, literally pronouncing the name of Jesus' name over an individual when they repent as well as when they are baptized. No one has ever argued for a repentance formula based on this text, and thus we should not understand it as a baptismal formula either.

Counter-Argument

This argument is not determinative because the observation could go the other way. Rather than arguing that because we don't use a formula for repentance we should not use a formula for baptism, one could argue that because we use a formula for baptism we should also use a formula for repentance. I'm not suggesting that this is what Peter meant for us to do, but merely that the logic in your argument is faulty. Pointing out an inconsistency in our practice may just mean we need to change our practice.

Second, the grammar does not necessarily indicate what is being claimed. While a conjunction can serve to tie two things together as one, it does not always serve this purpose. For example, if a police officer were to say, “Stop and raise your hands slowly,” he doesn't mean that you are to stop slowly and raise your hands slowly. “Slowly” only applies to raising your hands. To prove that INJC applies to both repentance and baptism, one needs to appeal to more than a mere conjunction.

The grammatical structure of Acts 2:38 favors the view that Peter only intended to connect INJC with baptism, not repentance. “Repent” is second-person plural, whereas “be baptized” is third-person singular. This shift in person and number is significant because it suggests that the command to repent and the command to be baptized are grammatically distinct from one another. The prepositional phrase “INJC” stands in relation to baptism, not repentance, describing how the hearers were to be baptized. This makes sense in light of the purpose of baptism: Baptism serves to identify us with the person of Jesus Christ, and thus we would expect to have His name invoked over us in during the rite. Repentance does not serve this purpose, and thus there is no reason to invoke the name of Jesus over one during repentance.⁶

In summary, while a decent case can be made for the “silent baptism” or “no-formula” view, the preponderance of evidence favors the use of a verbal, baptismal formula.

⁶We often think of repentance as the period of time we spend confessing our sins to God and asking for His forgiveness. While confession is surely part of repentance, repentance and confession are two different things. The Greek word for repentance, *metanoo*, refers to a changing of one's mind. In the Christian sense, one repents when they change their mind about their sin, looking to Jesus as their Savior. This is a spiritual-mental act, not a physical act, and it happens instantaneously. On a practical level, we could never know when someone is experiencing repentance to be able to invoke the name of Jesus over them in the moment. The same is not true of baptism. Baptism is a physical act, and thus we have the opportunity to invoke the name of Christ during the process.

RATING: I rate this option a “3” (possible). Given the fact that we see many examples in Scripture where doing something “in the name of” involves an oral invocation of that name, but a much smaller number of examples where it does not involve an oral invocation of that name, we have to determine whether an oral invocation was intended by each individual context. We cannot simply presume one or the other. The passages in Matthew and Acts do not clearly indicate that these phrases were meant to be used as oral invocations, and thus it’s possible that neither INJC nor INFSHS are baptismal formulas. On the other hand, 1 Corinthians 1:12-13 heavily implies that baptism involved some sort of verbal formula, as does James 2:7 when it speaks of the name of Jesus being invoked over believers. Given the strength of both the arguments and counter-arguments, I find the Biblical data to be indeterminate, and thus rate this option a “3.”

The Proper Baptismal Formula Is “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”

When Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize converts, He also instructed them about how they were to baptize: “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). The command came straight from Jesus. The disciples already understood the concept of baptism. Jesus was merely providing them with the formula that would distinguish Jesus’ baptism from all other forms of baptism.

This is the only place in the New Testament that specifically tells us how we ought to baptize converts, and thus we should understand these words to be the precise formula that Jesus intended for baptism. While it’s true that we do not see the apostles repeating these words in the Acts of the Apostles, Acts never records what was actually said during baptism. If Luke meant to say that the name of Jesus was orally invoked over the baptizand, he could have done so. Indeed, he did so in other contexts. In Acts 3:6, we read that “Peter said...‘in the name of Jesus Christ rise and walk.’” He verbally pronounced the name of Jesus for healing. Similarly, in Acts 19:13, when describing the sons of Sceva’s failed efforts to exorcise a demon, Luke tells us that they “invoke[d] the name of Jesus Christ over those who had evil spirits, saying ‘I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.’” In Acts 16:18, Paul spoke to a demonic spirit saying, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” The name of Jesus was clearly invoked in the context of exorcisms. Why, then, didn’t Luke speak in a similar way in baptismal contexts if Luke meant for us to understand “in the name of Jesus” as a baptismal formula? It’s best to understand “INJC” to be a description of the kind of baptism being performed (Christian), a way of referring to the fact that those who are baptized are joined to Jesus, or possibly a shorthand way of referring to the formula Jesus provided in Matthew 28:19.

Counter-Argument

It’s well understood that “in the name of” often refers to authority. For example, to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray in the authority of and according to the will of Jesus. The Jewish leadership asked the apostles “By what power, or in what name, have you done this [healing]?” (Acts 4:7). In other words, on whose authority did you heal this man? Peter answered that it was “by the name of Jesus Christ” that he healed the man (Acts 4:10). Paul invoked the authority of Christ in his second letter to the church at Thessalonica, saying, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us” (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

In most cases, the context alone makes it clear when “in the name of” is intended to convey the notion of authority. This is true of Matthew 28:19 as well. The context explicitly refers to authority. Jesus began

by saying, “All *authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). The command to baptize is connected to this fact. Notice that Jesus went on to say, “Go, *therefore*... (Matthew 28:19). In other words, because Jesus had been given all authority the disciples were to go into the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing those who put their faith in Jesus. When Jesus tells them to baptize people “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), he is speaking of the authority by which they were to baptize.

If Jesus meant for the disciples to invoke the words “INFSHS” when baptizing, it’s quite odd that we never see them doing so when performing actual baptisms in the Acts of the Apostles. Every baptism in Acts is described as being INJC. Could this just be Luke’s way of identifying these baptisms as Christian? This is unlikely for three reasons. First, there would be no reason for Luke to identify these baptisms as Christian when writing to Christians. The readers would naturally understand these baptisms to be Christian baptisms. Even non-Christians who read the Acts of the Apostles would naturally understand these baptisms to be Christian baptisms given the literary context.

Second, even if Luke felt the need to clarify that these baptisms were Christian baptisms, he would only need to do so once. Instead, Luke does so four times (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5).

Third, why would Luke be so inconsistent with this practice? He mentions people being baptized eight times, but only associates the name of Jesus Christ with those baptisms four times.⁷ Why would he feel the need to specify that four of the baptisms were Christian baptisms, but not the other four?

We might wonder, then, why Luke did not make it clearer that the name of Jesus was being orally invoked over the baptizands like he did when speaking of exorcisms and prayers for healing? I do not know. However, the lack of specificity in the context of baptism is not itself evidence that the name of Jesus was not orally invoked at baptism. That would be an argument from silence. The apostles could have pronounced the name of Jesus over the baptizand even though the text does not explicitly record them doing so.

RATING: I rate this option a “2” (somewhat unlikely). If we only had Jesus’ words regarding baptism (no data in Acts or the epistles regarding the administration of baptism), all Christians would probably be using the triune phrase as a baptismal formula. However, when we observe that (1) that the context of Matthew 28:19 is about the authority for baptism, (2) that Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:19 were never used or referenced in the context of actual baptisms, and (3) the name of Jesus is associated with baptism in both Acts and the epistles, the case for Matthew 28:19 being a baptismal formula is severely diminished.

The Proper Baptismal Formula Is “In the Name of Jesus Christ”

While Jesus commanded the disciples to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), there is no record that they ever did so – at least not using those precise words. The Acts of the Apostles is the only NT book that records converts being baptized. Of the eight baptisms recorded, none are said to have been baptized INFSHS. Instead, the converts are either told to be, or described as having been, baptized INJC:

- **Acts 2:38** And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

⁷Acts 2:41; 8:16,38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:14,34; 19:5.

- **Acts 8:14-16** Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- **Acts 10:48a** And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
- **Acts 19:5** On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

If Jesus intended for INFSHS to be used as the baptismal formula, it is beyond odd – not only that it never appears in Acts – but that a different phrase appears instead.

Could these references to INJC be mere references to the authority of Christ? In other words, was Luke simply describing the authority on which the church performed baptism (Jesus' authority)? This is possible given HNT, and given the fact that it was Jesus who commissioned them to baptize (Matthew 28:19). Indeed, the early church performed baptisms because Jesus gave them the authority to do so. And yet, this interpretation is doubtful given the fact that the Apostle Peter commanded people to be baptized INJC (Acts 2:38; 10:48). Why would he command people to be baptized in the authority of Jesus? The authority of Jesus to baptize explains the actions of the baptizer, not the actions of the baptizand. It explains why the baptizer is baptizing, not why the baptizand is getting baptized. They are getting baptized because Jesus commanded them to be baptized, not because Jesus gave them authority to be baptized. If Luke had only described baptism as being done INJC (as he did in Acts 8:16; 19:5), a good case could be made that Luke was merely speaking to the authority for such baptisms, but since Luke also records Peter instructing sinners and converts to be baptized INJC, it's doubtful that INJC is a mere reference to the authority of Jesus. When Peter told sinners to be baptized INJC, it sounds like he was telling them how and why they ought to be baptized, namely by having the name of Jesus invoked on them in baptism to join them to the *person* of Jesus (with the "name" representing Jesus' person, rather than His authority). This is precisely what Paul teaches regarding baptism in Romans 6:1-11:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

According to Paul, baptism unites us to Jesus so that what He experienced, we experience. Those who have been baptized have been baptized into Jesus' death, being crucified with Him. We are also buried with Jesus by means of our baptism. And because Jesus rose again, we are also presently alive to God spiritually and will be resurrected bodily in the future. The purpose of baptism, according to Paul, is to unite us to Jesus so that we can experience His death, burial, and resurrection. He calls this being "baptized into Christ." While that in itself does not demand that he was referencing a baptismal formula, his theology of baptism does. If the purpose of baptism is to unite us to Jesus so that His death,

burial, and resurrection becomes our death, burial, and resurrection, then it stands to reason that the early Christians were baptized INJC. Even on Trinitarian theology, it wasn't the Father or Holy Spirit that died and rose again. It was Jesus alone. If the purpose of baptism is to identify us with Jesus and His salvific work, then it is in His name alone that we are baptized. Remember, on HNT, a person is connected to their name. We are connected to Jesus by identifying with His name, invoked over us in baptism.

This conclusion is further strengthened by Paul's statements in Galatians and Colossians:

- **Galatians 3:27** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.⁸
- **Colossians 2:11** In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

In both passages, Paul speaks of baptism as being "into Christ" or "in Him." Baptism identifies us with Jesus and connects us to His death, burial, and resurrection. To be baptized is to put on Christ. And the way we put on Christ is by invoking His name. The Jesus' name formula is a verbal description of what is transpiring in the baptismal waters as the baptizand puts his faith in Jesus. It describes what is happening spiritually in that watery grave. In baptism, we are actually being baptized into the *person* of Jesus Christ – being legally and/or spiritually joined to Him – thereby receiving the benefits of the redemption He provided for us.

There are other passages in the epistles that also support the notion that the early church baptized converts using the Jesus' name formula. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul addressed the issue of factions within the church:

What I mean is that each one of you says "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:12-13)

⁸It is also possible that Paul is referring to Spirit baptism rather than water baptism in Galatians 3:27. Paul uses similar terminology in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where he clearly has Spirit baptism in mind.

Gal 3:27-28	1 Cor 12:13
For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.	For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body
There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female,	—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.	—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Both passages speak of being baptized into something. Galatians refers to being baptized into Christ, while 1 Corinthians refers to being baptized into one body. However, in the context of 1 Corinthians 12, "the body" refers to Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Both passages speak of being baptized into Christ. First Corinthians simply adds that this baptism is accomplished by the Spirit.

Similarly, in both passages, Paul follows his statement regarding baptism with an affirmation that in Christ, ethnic and social differences are irrelevant. Given the similarity of wording and the same combination of thoughts, it is likely that Paul had the same kind of baptism in view in both passages. What he made explicit in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is implicit in Galatians 3:27: "Through the baptism of the Spirit we have put on Christ, being made one in Him."

Paul's point is that you are disciples of the person in whose name you were baptized. Had the Corinthians been disciples of Paul, they would have been baptized in the name of Paul. Had they been disciples of Peter, they would have been baptized in the name of Peter. But they are not disciples of Paul, Peter, or Apollos. They are disciples of Jesus, and thus it follows from Paul's logic that they had been baptized in Jesus' name.

Finally, consider what Peter said in the first sermon of the church: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38).

Why would Peter tell people to be baptized INJC in Acts 2? This was only 10-20 days after Jesus instructed the apostles to baptize people INFSHS. Surely Peter hadn't forgotten what Jesus said. Even if he had, one of the other apostles could have corrected him, but no such correction was given. Every time we are provided with the details surrounding someone's baptism in Acts, it is always said that they were baptized INJC. Surely Peter was not disobeying Jesus, and surely there is no contradiction between what Jesus said and what Peter said and did. What Peter taught and practiced must have been the correct understanding of what Jesus meant in Matthew. As such, the proper baptismal formula must be INJC. But how did Peter get "INJC" from Jesus' instructions to baptize INFSHS?

Traditionally, Oneness Pentecostals have argued that the key to understanding this is in Jesus' use of the singular "name." They point out that Jesus didn't say to be baptized in the *names* (plural) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but rather into the *name* (singular). It is said that the singular "name" followed by three appellations is grammatically incorrect. Jesus should have used the plural form, "names," if He meant for us to repeat His words exactly. He intentionally used the singular "name" because He had one name in mind: Jesus. Jesus is the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The apostles correctly understood Jesus' intent when they baptized people in the singular name of Jesus.

Notice that I referred to Father, Son, and Spirit as "three appellations" rather than "three names." That's because Oneness Pentecostals have traditionally argued that Father, Son, and Spirit are not names, but titles. God's name is not "Father," nor "Son," nor "Holy Spirit." These are titles for God. God's name is YHWH. This is another reason the apostles baptized in the name of Jesus. They knew Jesus wanted them to baptize in one name, and they knew that neither Father, Son, nor Spirit were names. Jesus is the name of God because the name of Jesus literally means "YHWH is salvation."

I am not convinced by either of these claims (that Matthew 28:19 is grammatically incorrect or that Father, Son, and Spirit are not names). Let me address the grammatical claim first. There is nothing grammatically incorrect with the singular use of "name" followed by multiple names. "Of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" is a string of three genitival phrases modifying the singular "name." I would argue that the prepositional phrase, "in the name," is implied for both the Son and the Holy Spirit, so that the intended sense of the verse is, "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and [in the name] of the Son, and [in the name] of the Holy Spirit." It would be similar to my saying, "Arrest them in the name of the king and the queen and the motherland." The singular use of "name" is justified because "in the name of" is implied for both the queen and the motherland. The sentence could be expanded to read, "Arrest them in the name of the king, and the name of the queen, and the name of the motherland." In Matthew 28:19, the singular "name" is being applied to each of the three appellations individually, and hence the use of the singular "name" is grammatically justified. If I am

right, then making a big deal over the singular use of “name” as an obvious signal that Jesus meant for the disciples to pick up on some deeper meaning, is misguided.

What about the claim that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are titles rather than names, and that the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit is the name of Jesus? While it’s technically true that each of these are titles rather than names, they function as names in Scripture. The fact of the matter is that God’s revealed name, YHWH, is never used in the NT. He is only referred to as Father (254 times), God (1236 times), and Lord (at least 168 times). The NT writers use these titles as names in the NT. As for the “Holy Spirit,” this is not a title that replaces a name like “Father” replaces “YHWH.” “Holy Spirit” is the only way of referring to...well...the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, it’s pressing the use of language too far to say that titles can’t be referred to as “names.” It is completely within the normal usage of “name” to refer to a title. If an English law officer said, “Stop in the name of the king,” nobody would say, “I’m not stopping because ‘king’ is a title rather than a name. If you want me to stop, you need to provide me with the actual name of the king.” Or, one might say, “I come to you in the name of the President of the United States.” The person means to communicate that they are coming as a representative of the person who occupies the office of president. This is a legitimate use of “name,” even though it is connected with a title rather than a proper name.

It is even used this way in Scripture. In Isaiah 9:6 we read, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” The “name” of the child consists of what we would consider to be four titles.

“Son” is referred to as a name in the homily of Hebrews:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? (Hebrews 1:1-2,4-5)

According to the author, the Son has inherited a name more excellent than the angels, but he does not go on to identify His name as Jesus. Instead, he quotes two Old Testament texts which identify His name as “Son.” Since titles can be used as names, there is no reason to think Jesus’ use of “name” followed by three titles was code for the disciples to discern that He wanted them to use the name of Jesus instead.

What about the claim that Jesus is the name of the Father, Jesus is the name of the Son, and Jesus is the name of the Holy Spirit? While it’s obvious that the name of the Son is Jesus, where does the Bible identify “Jesus” as the name of the Father and the name of the Holy Spirit? Nowhere. Verses that are often appealed to in support of this notion fail to persuade.⁹ Consider John 5:43: “I have come in my

⁹Oneness scholar, Daniel Segraves, also argues against this take on Matthew 28:19. Listen to his lecture on the topic, “Father Son and Holy Ghost are Names not Titles” at <http://www.apostolic-preaching.com/mp3/Daniel%20Segraves%20-%20Father%20Son%20and%20Holy%20Ghost%20are%20Names%20not%20Titles.mp3>. Segraves does argue, however, that the singular “name” is significant. The disciples were to understand that the singular name Jesus had in mind was the singular name by which God identified Himself in the OT: YHWH. They understood that the Father was YHWH, and that the Spirit is the Spirit of YHWH. As the incarnation of YHWH, Jesus is also YHWH. Jesus’ name is literally “YHWH saves,” so the apostles understood Jesus to mean that they were to baptize in the name of Jesus, which is the name above all names (Philippians 2:9-11).

Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him." Jesus didn't say "Jesus" is His Father's name, but that He *came* in His Father's name. What does it mean to come in someone's name? It means to come in that person's authority. For example, we might say "I come to you in the name of the law." We don't mean the law has a personal name, but that the law represents the power of the government. Jesus came in the authority of the Father, meaning the Father gave Jesus the authority to do and say everything that Jesus said and did. In other words, Jesus had the backing of the Father.

As for identifying the name of the Holy Spirit as "Jesus," two verses are often cited. Let's first look at 2 Corinthians 3:17: "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17). While I am persuaded that Paul is identifying Jesus as personally identical to the Holy Spirit, this text does not say the name of the Holy Spirit is "Jesus."

What about John 14:26: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jon 14:26)? Again, Jesus didn't say that the name of the Holy Spirit is "Jesus." He said the Holy Spirit would be sent in the name of Jesus; i.e. sent on behalf of and in the authority of Jesus.

Just because Oneness adherents understand Jesus to be personally identical to the Father and Spirit does not mean that Jesus is the name of the Father and Spirit. Scripture consistently uses "Jesus" in contradistinction to "Father" and "Holy Spirit." "Jesus" is used to refer to God's human mode of existence, while "Father" is used to refer to God's continued transcendent mode of existence. Scripture does not call the Father "Jesus" any more than it calls Jesus "Father." While Scripture teaches that Jesus' deity is identical to the deity of the Father, it consistently distinguishes between the appellations "Father" and "Jesus" because these appellations distinguish God's transcendent and incarnate modes of existence. To confuse the appellations is to confuse God's two modes of existence (as God, as man). If we interpret Matthew 28:19 to mean the name of the Father is Jesus, however, we are doing just that: confusing the distinction between God's existence as God, and His existence as man. If Scripture uses "Jesus" to refer to the Son and only the Son, we should not use it to refer to the Father and Holy Spirit as if it equally applies. While we may understand God to be one person, and recognize that Jesus' deity is that of the Father, it does not give us license to use Biblical terms in unbiblical ways.

How, then, can we explain why the apostles interpreted Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19 as a command to baptize in the name of Jesus? While I don't claim to have a fully satisfying answer, I propose that it was what Jesus said in the context. He prefaced His command to make disciples and baptize them INFSHS by saying, "**All authority** in heaven and on earth has been **given to me**, therefore..." (28:18). The focus is entirely on Jesus. He is the possessor of all authority. After He issued His command to baptize, He continued to speak exclusively of Himself: "Teaching them to obey everything **I** have commanded you. And remember, **I** am with you always" (28:20). The emphasis was on Christ alone. Together with the disciples' recognition that Jesus encapsulates our experience of God, they understood His words to mean that they were to baptize in His name. The person into whom we are baptized (name) is the same person who claimed all authority in heaven and earth: Jesus Christ. Perhaps that is why Peter understood Jesus to mean we are to baptize in His name. Whether it was due to the singular use of "name" or the context of Jesus' command, the fact remains that the apostles understood Jesus to mean they were to baptize in His name, and we should follow their lead.

Counter-Argument

It's well understood that "in the name of" often refers to authority. For example, to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray in the authority of Jesus. When Acts describes Christians as being baptized INJC, it never says the apostles used those words during baptism. Their baptism is merely described as being INJC. In other words, they were baptized on the authority of Jesus Christ. They were baptized per Jesus' command to be baptized. Alternatively, it could be a way of describing the baptism as Christian baptism, as opposed to other forms of baptism that existed in that day.

To think that INJC is a baptismal formula, we would need to see evidence that the apostles actually invoked those words over the baptizand during baptism. Acts does not provide us with that kind of evidence.

What is clear is that when Jesus commanded His apostles to baptize, He also described how they should baptize, and He said it should be done INFSHS. Given the clarity of Matthew 28:19 and the ambiguity of Acts, we should understand INFSHS as the proper baptismal formula.

RATING: I rate this option a "5" (very likely). While it's true that we never read of an apostle *saying* "in the name of Jesus" during baptism, baptism is always described as having been done in the name of Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles. It is highly doubtful that this was meant to express the authority by which the baptism was performed or to identify it as Christian baptism. Had that been the intent, mentioning it once would have been sufficient. Instead, Luke states it four times, which is entirely unnecessary given His audience and context. They knew full well what kind of baptism Luke was referring to and the authority by which those baptisms were administered. When you couple this observation with the fact that Paul repeatedly associates baptism with Jesus alone, even explaining that the purpose of baptism is to unite us to Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection, it makes sense as to why the early church would only baptize in Jesus' name: Only Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. These actions are not associated with the Father or Spirit. When both Acts and the epistles point to the use of the Jesus' name formula, it argues strongly in favor of that being the practice of the apostolic church. Whatever it was that Jesus meant in Matthew 28:19, He does not appear to be providing a baptismal formula to be repeated verbatim during the administration of baptism.

Both "In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" as well as "In the Name of Jesus Christ" are Acceptable Baptismal Formulas

Jesus intended for both "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (INFSHS) as well as "in the name of Jesus" (INJC) to be used as baptismal formulas. They are mere variants of each other and communicate the same essential message, and thus either (or both) can be legitimately used as a baptismal formula. There are good arguments for considering both to be a baptismal formula, and both are contained in Scripture, so how can we say one is right and the other wrong? Both are right and appropriate. We do not need to choose.

Even if one thinks Jesus only intended one of these forms to be a baptismal formula, what is actually riding on the form we identify as *the* baptismal formula? Yes, we should care to baptize people in the most Biblically accurate way possible, but what's actually riding on this debate? What's truly at stake when it comes to the baptismal formula? If INFSHS is the correct baptismal formula, will those who have

been baptized INJC be lost? If INJC is the correct baptismal formula, will those who have been baptized INFSHS be lost? Does the baptismal formula carry salvific importance?

To answer this question, we need to determine what it is that makes baptism effective. Is it the water? The formula? Faith? All three? Biblically, the only element identified with the effectiveness of baptism is faith:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2:11-12)

It is our faith in what God is doing through baptism that makes baptism effective. This much should be obvious. If an atheist were immersed in water in the name of Jesus, but did not believe in Jesus, would his baptism be effective? No. This reveals that the *sine qua non* of baptism is faith. Neither the water nor the formula make baptism effective.¹⁰ Only faith is connected to the effectiveness of baptism. If faith is the essential element that makes baptism effective, then there is no Biblical justification for thinking that variations in the water or the formula will interfere with God's work in baptism. Variations in the symbolic elements of baptism cannot override a person's faith.

Perhaps you will think I have moved to quickly from the observation that the Bible only connects faith to the effectiveness of baptism to the conclusion that, therefore, the water and formula must be symbolic only. So let's explore the question of what the baptismal formula actually accomplishes in baptism. Does it *mediate* the spiritual realities received in baptism, or does it merely *symbolize* the spiritual realities being effected by faith?

Mediatory or Symbolic?

While one ought to use a baptismal formula during baptism, does doing so cause the baptizand to receive the spiritual benefits of baptism – such that if the formula were not used (or the wrong formula were used) they would not receive the spiritual benefits? In other words, does the baptismal formula one uses have the power to make baptism effective or ineffective?

One might agree that the formula alone does not make baptism effective, but argue that faith alone does not make baptism effective either. Rather, a combination of both faith and the formula is required. Typically, those who advance this point of view point to a number of passages which talk about the power of the name of God or Jesus. From these, they conclude that one must verbally pronounce the name of Jesus to receive the spiritual benefits He has promised. This errs in at least two ways. First, it misunderstands HNT. When Scripture speaks about "the name," it is referring to the person who bears the name, to his authority, to his presence, etc. For example, when we read that the name of the Lord is a strong tower (Proverbs 18:10), it doesn't mean there is a big tower in the shape of the letters YHWH, but rather that YHWH Himself is a strong tower. Verses talking about the power of the name of God/Jesus do not teach that there is power in the mere utterance of the name, but power in the person who bears that name. We tap into that power by our faith in that person. That's not to exclude verbal pronouncements of the name, but merely to deny that the power comes from pronouncing the name.

¹⁰The water and formula may be necessary to provide the right context for faith, but it is faith alone that mediates the spiritual benefits of baptism.

Secondly, there are examples in Acts where people received the spiritual benefits only Jesus could provide without any verbal pronouncement of the name of Jesus. There are six instances in Acts where a person was healed or exorcised and Luke records for us what was said prior to the exorcism or healing. In four of those six instances, the name of Jesus is not recorded as having been invoked (9:33-34, 36-41; 13:6-11; 14:8-10; only 3:1-11 and 16:16-18 record the name of Jesus being spoken). If healings and exorcisms can be performed without orally invoking the name of Jesus, this argues against the notion that Jesus' name (or the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) must be verbally invoked in baptism for the baptizand to receive the spiritual benefits of baptism.¹¹

I think it goes without saying that the formula is not magical. It is a mere string of words. Christianity is not a mystical religion of magical incantations. Even the seven sons of Sceva, when they pronounced the name of Jesus in an attempted exorcism, were unsuccessful because they lacked faith (Acts 19:13-16). There was no power in saying "in the name of Jesus" alone. The power only comes when one has put their faith in the person who bears that name. In light of this, I find it difficult to conceive that the words spoken over the baptizand have the capacity to mediate any spiritual reality. It seems reasonable to believe that the formula is a verbal description of what is being brought about through one's faith in God during baptism.

Some may be uncomfortable in admitting as much, but this conclusion is no different than our acknowledgement that the baptismal waters do not mediate the spiritual reality.¹² It is just water. But we recognize that the water has symbolic value in the spiritual act.¹³ Just as the waters of baptism cannot mediate the spiritual realities effected through baptism, neither can the baptismal formula. The spiritual realities of baptism are only mediated by faith. If one has faith in what God is doing in the act they will receive the spiritual realities of the act. If they do not have faith in God, they will not receive those spiritual realities even if they are baptized in Jesus' name and immersed in water. Why? It's because the spiritual realities do not inhere within the circumstantial elements of the water and

¹¹One might wonder, then, why Scripture says only those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13). How can one call on the name of the Lord without actually speaking His name? We have to understand what it means to call on the Lord. It doesn't refer to something that is said, per se, but an appeal to the Lord for something. For example, Ananias told Paul to "rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). Paul was the baptizand, so Ananias is not referring to the baptismal formula. How was Paul calling on the name of Jesus, then? He did so by appealing to the person of Jesus for forgiveness/salvation. Granted, one may typically verbally utter the name of the person they are appealing to in their appeal, but it doesn't follow that it's necessary to receive what they are asking for. The verses I just cited above where Jesus did spiritual works despite the fact that the believer did not utter Jesus' name argue for this. Even on a practical level it seems clear that one can appeal to someone to do something for them without uttering their name, and the person will do it for them. Imagine that you and your good friend Bob are ice fishing. The ice cracks and Bob falls in. He yells out, "Help!!!" He is trusting you to save him. Would you refuse to help him unless and until he verbally uttered your name? Of course not! You would still help him. While most people in Bob's situation may appeal to their friend using their friend's name, whether they verbally utter their friend's name or not will not make a difference in whether or not their friend will rescue them. Their friend will rescue them because they are appealing for help and trusting them to rescue him, not because Bob spoke their name. Why would God do any less? Why would Jesus look at the person in the baptismal waters who is trusting Jesus to rescue him from his sins, but refuse to do so because the person baptizing them said the wrong words?

¹²The entire act of baptism is symbolic, including the baptismal formula, the water, and our immersion into the water. Yet the symbolic nature of the various elements of baptism does not evacuate the rite of the spiritual realities conferred on us by God through our faith in what God is doing through the rite.

¹³Likewise, most Oneness Pentecostals recognize the distinction between the spiritual reality and the symbol in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. We do not believe our celebration to be any less valid than that described in Scripture even if we substitute the unleavened bread and wine of the Lord's Supper with saltines and grape juice. We still receive the spiritual benefits of the celebration even when the elements/symbols are changed. As it relates to baptism, no one is even suggesting that the circumstantial elements be changed, but rather that they be recognized for what they are—symbols—and not be ascribed magical powers of mediating the grace of God.

formula, and thus cannot be conferred by their use. The spiritual realities inhere within God Himself and are conferred on those who trust in God's ability to confer those realities through the rite of baptism. If the spiritual realities available through baptism were mediated by the water and the formula, the best means of evangelism would be to visit public swimming pools and beaches, and say "in Jesus' name" while people are in the water. Even the atheist who is immersed in Jesus' name would be forgiven of all sins! The absurdity of such a proposal only serves to highlight what we already know: only one's faith in God in the act of baptism can bring about the spiritual reality inherent to baptism.

If the spiritual reality of baptism is accomplished through the faith and obedience of the one being baptized, why should we think that the spiritual reality of baptism can be nullified if the person doing the baptizing uses the wrong formula? It is most reasonable to conclude that the baptismal formula is symbolic, not mediatory in nature.

Other Reasons to Think the Baptismal Formula is Not Salvific

We might also ask how God could justly condemn someone to hell merely for having the wrong words invoked over them while in the water? As a new convert, they don't even know what is supposed to be said during baptism, but trust that the Christian doing the baptizing is doing it right. Is our salvation dependent on the words of another person? This seems to emphasize the wrong thing: words over faith. It makes the baptismal formula out to be some sort of magical incantation, as though the spiritual realities of baptism are only conferred by speaking the right words. That is an unbiblical view of words, and spiritually dangerous.

Furthermore, how could God damn someone to hell for repeating Jesus' exact words when baptizing? Whether someone baptizes INFSHS or INJC, these words are taken directly from Scripture. And dare I say, the only reason for this debate is because God inspired the writers of Scripture to record two seemingly different baptismal formulas. If the baptismal formula truly rises to the level of salvific importance, why isn't this matter clearer in Scripture? It seems inconceivable to me that Jesus would send anyone to hell merely for being baptized using Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19, or the apostles' words in Acts.

Are the Symbols Dispensable?

If the baptismal formula is only symbolic of the spiritual realities effected by faith through baptism, then the spiritual benefits of baptism will accrue to the baptizand regardless of which formula is used. That's what it means to say the baptismal formula is symbolic rather than mediating in nature. Symbols do not *cause* the reality, but *reflect* the reality. The reality cannot be affected by the symbol, for if it were, it would no longer be a symbol, but part of the reality itself (its cause). Consider the following analogy: "1" is a symbol that represents the numerical concept of one. The symbol "1" does not cause the numerical concept, "one," to exist. It merely symbolizes the reality of the numerical concept. The numerical concept exists independently of its symbol. In a similar manner, the spiritual realities of baptism are not contingent on the symbols of baptism for their efficaciousness.

An immediate objection some will raise is that if the water and the formula are merely symbolic of the spiritual realities received by faith, and do not mediate those realities, why couldn't we substitute those symbols with other symbols, or dispense with them entirely? Why not just sprinkle someone with water, or immerse him in Dr. Pepper? Why not baptize people in the name of Mickey Mouse?

While this objection is understandable, it falls prey to the slippery slope fallacy. It's claimed that if we admit the circumstantial elements of baptism are symbolic in nature, it will ultimately lead to a complete disregard of the symbols. The problem with this line of reasoning is that there is no logical connection between recognizing the elements to be symbolic and disregarding them completely. While some may take such an extreme position, it does not follow logically. One would only have the liberty to change or abandon the circumstantial elements of baptism if it can be shown that the symbols are not relevant to the act in any significant way. The fact that they cannot mediate the spiritual realities only argues for the idea that they are symbolic, not for the idea that they are irrelevant. Indeed a good case can be made for the importance of maintaining the Biblical symbols, and I will make that case momentarily.

The fear that we will abandon the proper baptismal formula if we admit it is only symbolic is not justified given what we already recognize regarding the waters of baptism. We acknowledge that the water does not have the power to mediate the spiritual realities, and yet we continue to baptize people in water. Why should we believe, then, that if we admit to the symbolic nature of the baptismal formula that we will stop using a baptismal formula? We can, and should adhere to the circumstantial elements of baptism because of their theological and symbolic significance. We need not think that we need to assign a mediating significance to either the water or the formula to maintain their importance.

One might wonder, if the water and the formula are symbolic, how far could one deviate from the symbolism and still receive the spiritual realities of baptism? After all, if we put Cool Whip on people's noses and invoked the name of Mickey Mouse over them, it would hardly be "Christian" baptism. We recognize that there is a point at which the symbolism could deviate so much from what was intended that the symbols would either (1) not reflect the spiritual realities effected through baptism, or (2) prohibit one from experiencing those spiritual realities.

In regards to (1), this is why we ought to stick as close to the Biblical symbolism as possible (of course, the ultimate reason for not deviating from the Biblical symbols is simply because the Word of God gave us these symbols to mirror the spiritual realities). The circumstantial elements of baptism are only of value insofar as they accurately reflect the spiritual realities being effected through baptism. There is a relationship between the symbols and the reality. The spiritual realities are *expressed* through the symbols, although not mediated by the same. There is an interdependent relationship between the symbols of baptism and the grace of God displayed in the act. Apart from the symbols, there could be no operation through which God could display his grace. If we eliminated the water and the formula, it would no longer be baptism, but mere faith – indistinguishable from initial faith. That which is indistinguishable from something else is identical to it, and thus baptism as a rite ceases to exist. While we acknowledge the symbolic nature of the water and the formula, these elements are nevertheless essential to the act of baptism. Without them the act of baptism ceases to have any meaning; indeed, it ceases to exist as baptism.

In regards to (2), there is a danger that different symbols may prevent someone from receiving the spiritual realities of baptism. Faith is the operative element for receiving the spiritual realities of baptism. As such, if one places their faith in the wrong object, they will not receive the spiritual realities effected through baptism. It is possible that one could place their faith in the wrong object if pseudo symbols are used in the baptismal rite because symbols are like sign posts, pointing the way to the object of faith. Symbols are descriptive of what is happening in baptism (and thus our faith is informed by them): We are immersed in water to depict our burial with Christ and cleansing from sin, and a formula is invoked over us to describe the spiritual realities being effected through baptism. If these

symbols are exchanged for other symbols, the object to which these symbols point becomes distorted as well, possibly causing the baptizand to place their faith in the wrong object. When the symbols representing the spiritual realities become confused, the object to which those symbols point is often lost sight of as well, and could potentially cause one to misplace their faith, prohibiting them from experiencing the spiritual realities available through baptism.

Given the importance of symbols, debates over the proper mode (sprinkling, pouring, or immersion) and proper formula are understandable, and even appropriate. What we should not do, however, is think that slight variations in practice regarding modes and formulas are cause to doubt the salvation of entire groups of Christians.

Counter-Argument

If both INFSHS and INJC were intended as baptismal formulas, and both were understood as acceptable ways of baptizing by the apostolic church, why, then, do we not see anyone being baptized INFSHS in the Acts of the Apostles? We are given an indication as to how people were baptized four times in Acts, and all of them point to the use of INJC as the baptismal formula. Even the epistles presume the Jesus' name baptismal formula. Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19 stand alone, having no other Biblical support that it was interpreted to be a baptismal formula.

You are presuming that the baptismal formula is merely symbolic. Scripture does not say this. Of course, it's also true that Scripture does not say the baptismal formula mediates the spiritual benefits of baptism either. We are simply not told one way or the other. We are simply told to baptize using the formula. So why assume that the effectiveness of baptism doesn't depend on using the proper formula? Should we chance our salvation on our own presumptions about the purpose of the baptismal formula? Perhaps we would do well to admit that we can't know for certain what role the formula plays in the effectiveness of baptism, but nevertheless give our best efforts to figuring out the proper formula as if our salvation depended on it.

You haven't demonstrated that faith is the only element that makes baptism effective. You have only demonstrated that without faith, the water and formula do nothing. But this only shows that the water and formula are not sufficient conditions for receiving the spiritual benefits of baptism – not that they aren't necessary conditions (and just as necessary as faith). All three are essential to the effectiveness of baptism: the water, the formula, and faith. If you remove any one of those elements, the baptism is not effective. Indeed, if you removed the element of water, it's hard to see how what remained could even be understood to be a baptism. If you removed both the water and the formula, there would be no operation left through which one could exercise their faith. While no one element is sufficient for baptism, all three elements are necessary for baptism to be valid and efficacious.

Will God condemn someone who had the wrong formula invoked over him during baptism? Only God knows how He will judge, but at the end of the day, we are still responsible for teaching and practicing what the Word of God teaches. If it teaches that INFSHS is the proper formula, then we should baptize using that formula. If it teaches that INJC is the proper formula, then we should baptize using that formula. We should not take the approach that the formula does not matter. If it's in the Word of God, it matters to God and should matter to us.

RATING: This position is making two separate, but related claims: (1) Both INFSHS and INJC are baptismal formulas, and we are free to use both interchangeably; (2) The baptismal formula, though

important, does not carry salvific importance, so one's salvation does not depend on which baptismal formula was invoked over them. In regards to (1), I see very little Biblical justification for interpreting the triune phrase of Matthew 28:19 to be a baptismal formula, and thus I rate this notion a "1" (very unlikely). My assessment for (2) is quite different, however. I think the case for understanding the baptismal formula as symbolic rather than mediatory is very strong. The spiritual benefits of baptism are conferred by faith, not by the baptismal formula. As such, the spiritual benefits of baptism will be conferred to baptizands who exercise their faith in Jesus regardless of the baptismal formula used by the baptizer. I rate this notion a "5" (very likely). While we ought to use the baptismal formula intended by Jesus, we should not think the spiritual life of the baptizand hangs on the theological acumen of the baptizer. Averaging out the "1" and "5" ratings yields an overall rating of "3" (possible). However, since the main question concerns the proper baptismal formula rather than the significance of the baptismal formula, strictly speaking I will rate this position a "1" (very unlikely).

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Now that we have looked at the exegetical considerations for and against the four options concerning baptismal formulas, let's turn our attention to historical considerations. What did the church leaders and theologians believe and practice following the death of the apostles? How many used a baptismal formula? Of those who used a baptismal formula, how many used the INFSHS formula versus the INJC formula? Was there any debate in the early post-apostolic church regarding the baptismal formula? After all, baptism was an extremely important rite in the early church. Different regions of the church quickly developed additional traditions for baptism including triple immersion, fasting, exorcisms, renunciation of the devil, anointing with oil, confession of a creed, receiving a post-baptismal Eucharist, and the wearing of a white garment post-baptism. Given the importance of baptism and the baptismal ceremony, we would expect some fierce debates regarding the baptismal formula (just as there were fierce debates as to whether heretics needed to be rebaptized after they eschewed their heresy and embraced the orthodoxy of the institutional church):

- If the apostles did not use a baptismal formula, we would expect to see some bishops arguing for and some bishops arguing against the use of a baptismal formula.
- If the apostles originally baptized INFSHS, we would expect to see the majority of Christians in the second and third centuries baptizing INFSHS, with the majority of bishops debating a minority of bishops who sought to change the formula to INJC.
- If the apostles originally baptized INJC, we would expect to see the majority of Christians in the second and third centuries baptizing INJC, with the majority of bishops debating a minority of bishops who sought to change the formula to INFSHS.
- If the apostles used the INFSHS and INJC formulas interchangeably, we would expect to see the majority of bishops debating a minority of bishops who argued that only one of the formulas was acceptable.

I'll examine the post-apostolic writings through the fifth century to see what the early church fathers had to say about the baptismal formula. After I've surveyed the historical literature, I will make some general observations and rate each of the four options according to the evidence.

When assessing the historical data, it will be important to distinguish between mere mentions of the phrases "INFSHS" or "INJC" in the context of baptism, and an author identifying either as a baptismal formula. Several authors mention both phrases in the context of baptism, and yet few would argue that

they understand both as baptismal formulas. That means we need to do more than just point to writings where an author speaks of baptism INJC or INFSHS to determine their view of the proper baptismal formula. It must be clear from the context that the author understood such a phrase to be a baptismal formula, and used it as such.¹⁴

2nd Century

The Didache

The *Didache* is difficult to date. While some scholars date it to the 3rd or 4th centuries, the consensus view is that it was written in the late 1st or early 2nd century (A.D. 70-120). If we assume the consensus view, the *Didache* is our earliest record of Christian practice concerning baptism outside the Bible. Interestingly, it associates “the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” as well as “in the name of the Lord” with baptism:

And concerning baptism, **baptize this way**: Having first said all these things, **baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit**, in living water. But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot in cold, in warm. But if you have not either, **pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and 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.

...

But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving [Eucharist], but they who have been **baptized into the name of the Lord**; for concerning this also the Lord has said, Give not that which is holy to the dogs. – *Didache*, ch 7,¹⁵

Of the two phrases, it appears that the author understood the triune phrase as a baptismal formula to be orally invoked over the baptizand. First, he mentions the triune formula in the context of prescribing how baptism ought to be administered. Second, the text mentions the pouring of water over the baptizand’s head three times into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three pourings surely correspond to each of the three names, indicating that the name of the Father was spoken over the baptizand during the first pouring, the name of the Son was spoken over the baptizand during the second pouring, and the name of the Holy Spirit was spoken over the baptizand during the third pouring.

Why, then, would he also speak of people being baptized “into the name of the Lord”? It could be a shorthand way of referring to the triune formula. It could be an affirmation that the baptizand is joined to the person of Jesus during baptism, or it could be a way of demarcating the baptism as Christian baptism (as opposed to other forms of baptism practiced by other religious groups). However the author understood it, he doesn’t have any problem describing Christians as being baptized INJC even though they were baptized using the INFSHS formula. He did not see the two phrases as contradictory or in need of further explanation.

¹⁴This methodological difference is where I would part with some Oneness Pentecostal writers who have written on this topic. For example, in his book, *Oneness and Trinity, A.D. 100-300: The Doctrine of God in Ancient Christian Writings*, David Bernard dedicates an entire chapter to identifying individuals and groups who baptized INJC in the post-apostolic church. However, he seems to think that any use of the phrase “in the name of Jesus” in association with baptism is evidence that the author was referring to or practiced baptism INJC. Examples (such as the *Didache*) where the author associates both INJC and INFSHS with baptism demonstrate the problem with this approach. We should not conclude that an author is using the phrase “INJC” or “INFSHS” to refer to a baptismal formula unless the context indicates that the author is referring to what is *said* during baptism.

¹⁵<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm>

The Shepherd of Hermas

The *Shepherd of Hermas* was written sometime in the first half of the second century, probably near Rome. The author speaks of those who “wish to be baptized in the name of the Lord,” but there is nothing in the context to indicate that he understood this phrase as a baptismal formula to be orally invoked over the baptizand:

“Now the other stones which you saw cast far away from the tower, and falling upon the public road and rolling from it into pathless places, are those who have indeed believed, but through doubt have abandoned the true road. Thinking, then, that they could find a better, they wander and become wretched, and enter upon pathless places. But those which fell into the fire and were burned are those who have departed forever from the living God; nor does the thought of repentance ever come into their hearts, on account of their devotion to their lusts and to the crimes which they committed. Do you wish to know who are the others which fell near the waters, but could not be rolled into them? These are they who have heard the word, and wish **to be baptized in the name of the Lord**; but when the chastity demanded by the truth comes into their recollection, they draw back, and again walk after their own wicked desires.” She finished her exposition of the tower. But I, shameless as I yet was, asked her, “Is repentance possible for all those stones which have been cast away and did not fit into the building of the tower, and will they yet have a place in this tower?” “Repentance,” said she, “is yet possible, but in this tower they cannot find a suitable place. But in another and much inferior place they will be laid, and that, too, only when they have been tortured and completed the days of their sins. And on this account will they be transferred, because they have partaken of the righteous Word. And then only will they be removed from their punishments when the thought of repenting of the evil deeds which they have done has come into their hearts. But if it does not come into their hearts, they will not be saved, on account of the hardness of their heart.” – *Shepherd of Hermas*, Third Vision, ch 7¹⁶

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr wrote his *First Apology* in A.D. 155. He specifically says the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are “pronounced over” the baptizand. This demonstrates not only that a baptismal formula was being used by the mid-second century in Rome, but also that the triune phraseology found in Matthew’s gospel was understood as the proper baptismal formula:

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ; lest, if we omit this, we seem to be unfair in the explanation we are making. As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. **For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.** For Christ also said, Unless you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Now, that it is impossible for those who have once been born to enter into their mothers' wombs, is manifest to all. And how those who have sinned and repent shall escape their sins, is declared by Esaias the prophet, as I wrote above; he thus speaks: Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from your souls; learn to do well; judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow: and come and let us reason together, says the Lord. And though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white like wool; and though they be as crimson, I will make them white as snow. But if you refuse and rebel, the sword shall devour you: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. And for this [rite] we have learned from the apostles this reason. Since at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, by our parents coming together, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training; in order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and **may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe; he who leads to the laver the person that is to be washed calling him by this name alone.** For no one can utter the name of the ineffable God; and if any one dare to say that there is a name, he raves with a hopeless madness. And this washing is called illumination, because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings. **And in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of**

¹⁶<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-02/anf02-07.htm>

the Holy Ghost, who through the prophets foretold all things about Jesus, he who is illuminated is washed. — Justin Martyr, First Apology, 61¹⁷

Acts of Paul and Thecla

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is an apocryphal text written in the latter half of the second century. It is generally orthodox in its theological perspective, so it may represent mainstream views in the second century. It speaks of a woman who baptized herself in the name of Jesus. In one place it speaks of her “saying: In the name of Jesus Christ I am baptized.” This would suggest that INJC was being used as a baptismal formula. However, it goes on to say “she...threw herself [in the water] in the name of Jesus Christ.” In that context, it appears to be used as a way of describing the reason she threw herself into the water; i.e. for the sake of Jesus Christ. Since both phrases are describing the same event (her throwing herself into the water), it is unclear if INJC should be understood as a baptismal formula in this passage. When she said, “In the name of Jesus Christ I am baptized on my last day,” she may have been addressing the onlookers, explaining to them why she was doing what she was doing (doing it for Jesus Christ) rather than uttering a baptismal formula:

And Thecla, having been taken out of the hand of Tryphaena, was stripped, and received a girdle, and was thrown into the arena, and lions and bears and a fierce lioness were let loose upon her; and the lioness having run up to her feet, lay down; and the multitude of the women cried aloud. And a bear ran upon her; but the lioness, meeting the bear, tore her to pieces. And again a lion that had been trained against men, which belonged to Alexander, ran upon her; and she, *the lioness*, encountering the lion, was killed along with him. And the women made great lamentation, since also the lioness, her protector, was dead.

Then they send in many wild beasts, she standing and stretching forth her hands, and praying. And when she had finished her prayer, she turned and saw a ditch full of water, and said: Now it is time to wash myself. And she threw herself in, **saying: In the name of Jesus Christ I am baptized on my last day.** And the women seeing, and the multitude, wept, saying: Do not throw thyself into the water; so that also the governor shed tears, because the seals were going to devour such beauty. She then threw herself **in the name of Jesus Christ**; but the seals having seen the glare of the fire of lightning, floated about dead. And there was round her, as she was naked, a cloud of fire; so that neither could the wild beasts touch her, nor could she be seen naked.—Acts of Paul and Thecla¹⁸

Irenaeus

In approximately A.D. 190, Irenaeus wrote about an “invocation of the Lord” in baptism. This denotes some kind of baptismal formula, but which formula? “Of the Lord” would seem to refer to Jesus, and thus this passage lends credibility to INJC as the baptismal formula:

And [Naaman] dipped himself, says [the Scripture], seven times in Jordan. It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but [it served] as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are **made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord**, from our old transgressions; being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: Unless a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. — Irenaeus, Fragment 34

This interpretation may be too hasty, however, given Irenaeus’ other writings. He specifically mentions the triune phrase in *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (A.D. 180 or 190), but it’s not clear if he is using it as a baptismal formula or just referring to the authority for baptism. At the end of the day, it’s not clear what Irenaeus’ view of the baptismal formula was and how baptism was practiced in Lyon (modern France):

Now faith occasions this for us; even as the Elders, the disciples of the Apostles, have handed down to us. First of all it bids us bear in mind that **we have received baptism for the remission of sins, in the name of God the Father, and in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnate and died and rose again, and in the Holy Spirit of God.**

¹⁷<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm>

¹⁸<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-08/anf08-89.htm>

And that this baptism is the seal of eternal life, and is the new birth unto God, that we should no longer be the sons of mortal men, but of the eternal and perpetual God; and that what is everlasting and continuing is made God; and is over all things that are made, and all things are put under Him; and all the things that are put under Him are made His own; for God is not ruler and Lord over the things of another, but over His own; and all things are God's; and therefore God is Almighty, and all things are of God. – Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 3.¹⁹

Summary

We have five witnesses and six documents pertaining to the baptismal formula from the second century, one of which comes from an apocryphal source.

- No authors deny or argue against the use of a baptismal formula.
- Four authors refer to people being baptized INJC, but it's not clear in any of those writings that INJC was referring to a baptismal formula invoked over baptizands (Didache, Shepherd of Hermas, Acts of Paul and Thecla, Irenaeus). The Acts of Paul and Thecla provides the best evidence for the use of INJC as a baptismal formula, but it is not sufficiently clear in my opinion to be considered conclusive.
- At least two witnesses provide positive evidence that INFSHS was used as a baptismal formula in at least some parts of the church in the second century church, including Rome (Justin Martyr, Didache).
- The Didache mentions both phrases, but only identifies INFSHS as a baptismal formula. The most reasonable conclusion is that the author of the Didache understood INFSHS to be the proper baptismal formula, but the possibility that he understood both INFSHS and INJC as valid formulas cannot be ruled out. There is no positive evidence for that conclusion, however.

Given the paucity of evidence from the second century, we can't know how widespread the use of the triune formula was, but the only clear evidence we have for either INJC or INFSHS being used as a baptismal formula in the second century points to INFSHS rather than INJC.

3rd Century

Tertullian

Tertullian wrote *On Baptism* sometime between A.D. 200-206. By comparing the triune phrase of Matthew 28:19 to the law of establishing a word by the "mouth" of two or three witnesses, Tertullian implies that the triune formula was something spoken over the baptizand. Indeed, he even speaks of it as a baptismal "formula:"

Not that in the waters we obtain the Holy Spirit; but in the water, under (the witness of) the angel, we are cleansed, and prepared for the Holy Spirit. In this case also a type has preceded; for thus was John beforehand the Lord's forerunner, preparing His ways. Thus, too, does the angel, the witness of **baptism**, make the paths straight for the Holy Spirit, who is about to come upon us, by the washing away of sins, which faith, **sealed in (the name of) the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit**, obtains. **For if in the mouth of three witnesses every word shall stand: — while, through the benediction, we have the same (three) as witnesses of our faith whom we have as sureties of our salvation too — how much more does the number of the divine names suffice for the assurance of our hope likewise!** [Tertullian, *On Baptism*, ch 6] ... For the law of **baptizing** has been imposed, and the **formula prescribed: Go, He says, teach the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.** – Tertullian, *On Baptism*, ch 13²⁰

In A.D. 216, in *Against Praxeas*, Tertullian asserts that the three names of Matthew 28:19 are mentioned during baptism. Apparently the entire formula was spoken three times, once after each of three

¹⁹https://www.ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/demonstr.preaching_the_demonstration_of_the_apostolic_preaching.html

²⁰<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0321.htm>

immersions into the water (similar to what is described in the Didache): “After his resurrection he promises in a pledge to his disciples that he will send them the promise of his Father; and lastly, he commands them to **baptize into the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, not into a unipersonal God. 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.**”²¹ This provides evidence of the triune formula being used in North Africa in the third century.

Hippolytus

In about A.D. 215, Hippolytus wrote *Apostolic Tradition*, a record of various traditions of the church. This is how Hippolytus recorded the administration of baptism:

Then, after these things, let him give him over to the presbyter who baptizes, and let the candidates stand in the water, naked, a deacon going with them likewise. ¹²And when he who is being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, **shall say thus: Dost thou believe in God, the Father Almighty?** ¹³And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe. ¹⁴**Then holding his hand placed on his head, he shall baptize him once.** ¹⁵And then he shall say: **Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God,** who was born of the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the quick and the dead? ¹⁶**And when he says: I believe, he is baptized again.** ¹⁷And again he shall say: **Dost thou believe in [the] Holy Ghost,** and the holy church, and the resurrection of the flesh? ¹⁸He who is being baptized shall say accordingly: I believe, and **so he is baptized a third time.** – Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 21.11-18²²

This is clear evidence that the triune formula was being used in Rome in the third century.

Origen

Sometime before A.D. 231, Origen wrote that “the authority and dignity of the Holy Ghost is so great that saving baptism cannot be conferred except by the authority of all the Persons of the most exalted Trinity, that is, **through the mention of the Father and Son and Holy Ghost.**”²³ The fact that he refers to the “mention” of the three names makes it clear that he referring to the triune phrase as a baptismal formula that was orally invoked over the baptizand.

Further evidence that the triune formula was used by Origen comes from his *Homily on Leviticus* (A.D. 238-244). Origen writes that “those who are cleansed are made clean, not through **the first**, nor the **second invocation**, but except the **third invocation be pronounced**, one cannot be made clean.”²⁴ The fact that he uses both “invocation” and “pronounced” makes it clear that he has a baptismal formula in mind, and the fact that he refers to three invocations implies that he has the triune formula of Matthew 28:19 in mind. This provides evidence for the triune formula being used in the regions of Egypt and Israel in the third century.

In his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (A.D. 243-246), Origen specifically addressed the apparent conflict between Matthew 28:19 and Paul’s reference to being baptized in the name of Jesus in Romans 6. Origen thought that only baptism in the name of the Trinity was legitimate, so he had to find a way to harmonize Paul’s statement with Matthew 28:19. He does so by claiming that since Paul was only focused on the death of Jesus, he only mentions Jesus in connection with baptism (but assumed the other two persons of the Trinity were named as well):

²¹Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 26. See <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0317.htm>.

²²<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/61614/61614-h/61614-h.htm>

²³Origen, *De Principiis*, book 1, chapter 3, 2. See <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04121.htm>.

²⁴Origen, *Homily on Leviticus*, 7.4. See <https://dokumen.pub/homilies-on-leviticus-1-16-fathers-of-the-church-0813200830-9780813200835.html> or <https://www.scribd.com/document/722453678/Origen-Homilies-on-Leviticus-1-16>.

You may perhaps also be asking this: **Since the Lord himself told the disciples to baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, why does the Apostle employ here the name of Christ alone in baptism? For he says, "We have been baptized into Christ," although surely it should not be deemed a legitimate baptism unless it is in the name of the Trinity.** But look at Paul's good sense since, indeed, **in the present passage he was not interested in discussing the subject of baptism as much as the death of Christ**, in whose likeness he argues that we should die to sin and be buried with Christ. **Obviously it was not appropriate to name either the Father or the Holy Spirit in a passage in which he was speaking about death.** For "the Word became flesh" and where there is flesh, it is fitting to treat the subject of death. **But it was not fitting for him to say, "We who have been baptized in the name of the Father or in the name of the Holy Spirit, have been baptized into his death."** Consequently, in this passage one should keep in mind the Apostle's custom in other places, that when he cites the Scriptures, he does not always cite the complete wording of the text as it is found in the original passage, but he takes only as much as is called for by his current argument. Thus in the expression we have mentioned here, because he desired to teach about the death of Christ, it is sufficient for him to say, **"We who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into his death."** (8) But it seems to me that the Apostle did not pointlessly prefix in this section what he says, "Do you not know?" For he is showing by this question that back then, i.e., in the age of the apostles, not only was the form of the mysteries given to those who were baptized, as we see happening in the present time, but also their effective power and meaning were imparted, as if to those who knew and had been instructed that those who are baptized are baptized into the death of Christ and are buried with him through baptism into death; and that "just as Christ rose from the dead through the glory of the Father," so those who were baptized "ought to walk in newness of life." For the Apostle writes these things. – Origen, Commentary on the Epistle of Romans, book 5, ch 7-8²⁵

On Rebaptism

The anonymous author of *On Rebaptism* (written in the mid- 3rd century) considered the question of whether heretics needed to be rebaptized when they came to embrace the orthodoxy of the institutional church.²⁶ This debate, known as the Rebaptism Controversy, featured Cyprian of Carthage on the one side, and Pope Stephen I of Rome on the other. Cyprian argued that rebaptism was necessary, while Stephen argued it was not. The author of *On Rebaptism* takes the side of Stephen. He refers to heretics being baptized in the name of Jesus, and argues that they do not need to be rebaptized when coming to the true faith because they had already been baptized in Jesus' name:

I observe that it has been asked among the brethren what course ought specially to be adopted towards the persons of those who, although baptized in heresy, have yet been **baptized in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, and subsequently departing from their heresy, and fleeing as supplicants to the Church of God, should repent with their whole hearts, and only now perceiving the condemnation of their error, implore from the Church the help of salvation. The point is whether, according to the most ancient custom and ecclesiastical tradition, it would suffice, after that baptism which they have received outside the Church indeed, but still **in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord**, that only hands should be laid upon them by the bishop for their reception of the Holy Spirit, and this imposition of hands would afford them the renewed and perfected seal of faith; or whether, indeed, a repetition of baptism would be necessary for them, as if they should receive nothing if they had not obtained baptism afresh, just as if they were never **baptized in the name of Jesus Christ**. – Anonymous, *On Rebaptism*, ch 1²⁷

²⁵<https://dokumen.pub/origen-commentary-on-the-epistle-to-the-romans-books-1-5-fathers-of-the-church-0813201039-9780813201030.html>

²⁶Several church fathers and early theologians, including the author of *On Rebaptism*, speak of heretics, but do not always indicate what groups they are referring to or what belief(s) those groups held that were deemed to be heretical. While we might be able to make some educated guesses based on our knowledge of history, we cannot know for certain. It is difficult to know, then, whether these groups who baptized in Jesus' name were truly heretical or not. My guess is that some, if not most, were truly heretical. Others, however, such as the Patristians, were not heretical in my opinion. They would be considered as such, however, by the church fathers since the Patristians rejected the idea that God was more than one person. When I speak of "heretics," then, I am simply using the church fathers' language and not making any judgment as to whether these groups were truly heretical or not. The same is true for "orthodox." The institutional church considered themselves to be the defenders of Christian orthodoxy. When I refer to them as the orthodox, I am simply using their self-designated language, and not making any judgments as to the correctness of their theology. I prefer the term "institutional church" over "the orthodox," and use that language when linguistically appropriate.

²⁷<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-05/anf05-148.htm>

When discussing whether a bishop must lay his hands on someone for them to receive the Spirit, he mentioned three more times that the heretics were baptized in the name of Jesus – something he speaks of positively as if it were acceptable:

For he [the Ethiopian eunuch who encountered Philip] went on his way rejoicing, although, as thou observest, hands were not laid on him by the bishop, that he might receive the Holy Spirit. But if thou admittest this, and believest it to be saving, and dost not gainsay the opinion of all the faithful, thou must needs confess this, that even as this principle proceeds to be more largely discussed, that other also can be more broadly established; that is, that by the imposition of hands alone of the bishop – because **baptism in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ** has gone before it – may the Holy Spirit also be given to another man who repents and believes. Because the Holy Scripture has affirmed that they who should believe in Christ, must needs be baptized in the Spirit; so that these also may not seem to have anything less than those who are perfectly Christians; lest it should be needful to ask what sort of a thing was that **baptism** which they have attained **in the name of Jesus Christ**. Unless, perchance, in that former discussion also, about those who should only have been **baptized in the name of Jesus Christ**, thou shouldst decide that they can be saved even without the Holy Spirit, or that the Holy Spirit is not accustomed to be bestowed in this manner only, but by the imposition of the bishop's hands; or even shouldst say that it is not the bishop alone who can bestow the Holy Spirit. – On Rebaptism, ch 4²⁸

While the author has repeatedly referred to people being baptized in the name of Jesus, up to this point it has not been clear whether he understands this to be a baptismal formula or something else. However, later in the work, he clearly speaks of baptism INJC as a baptismal formula. He points to Cornelius as someone who received the Holy Spirit without the laying on of hands, even prior to baptism. He argues that they were forgiven prior to baptism, but baptism did serve the purpose of invoking the name of Jesus on them. By speaking of “invocation” several times, the author explicitly refers to an actual pronouncement made over the baptizand:

And there will be no doubt that men may be baptized with the Holy Ghost without water, as thou observest that these were baptized before they were baptized with water; that the announcements of both John and of our Lord Himself were satisfied, forasmuch as they received the grace of the promise both without the imposition of the apostle's hands and without the laver, which they attained afterwards. And their hearts being purified, God bestowed upon them at the same time, in virtue of their faith, remission of sins; so that the subsequent baptism conferred upon them this benefit alone, that they received also the **invocation of the name of Jesus Christ**, that nothing might appear to be wanting to the integrity of their service and faith. [On Rebaptism, ch 5] ... Nor, as I think, was it for any other reason that the apostles had charged those whom they addressed in the Holy Spirit, that they should be **baptized in the name of Christ Jesus**, except that the **power of the name of Jesus invoked upon any man by baptism** might afford to him who should be baptized no slight advantage for the attainment of salvation, as Peter relates in the Acts of the Apostles, saying: "For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." As also the Apostle Paul unfolds, showing that God hath exalted our Lord Jesus, and "given Him a name, that it may be above every name, that in the name of Jesus all should bow the knee, of things heavenly and earthly, and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord in the glory of God the Father." And he on whom, **when he should be baptized, invocation should be made in the name of Jesus**, although he might obtain baptism under some error, still would not be hindered from knowing the truth at some time or another, and correcting his error, and coming to the Church and to the bishop, and sincerely confessing our Jesus before men; so that then, when hands were laid upon him by the bishop, he might also receive the Holy Spirit, and **he would not lose that former invocation of the name of Jesus**. Which none of us may disallow, **although this invocation, if it be standing bare and by itself, could not suffice for affording salvation, lest on this principle we should believe that even Gentiles and heretics, who abuse the name of Jesus, could attain unto salvation without the true and entire thing.** ... For not for any other reason Peter-who had already been baptized and had been asked what he thought of the Lord by the Lord Himself, and the truth of the revelation of the Father in heaven being bestowed on him had confessed that Christ was

²⁸There is another reference to people being baptized in the name of Jesus in chapter 14: "And also to those who are made lawful believers, the baptism of their own blood is wanting without mischief, because, being **baptized in the name of Christ**, they have been redeemed with the most precious blood of the Lord; since both of these rivers of the baptism of the Lord proceed out of one and the same fountain, that every one who thirsts may come and drink, as says the Scripture, "From his belly flowed rivers of living water; " which rivers were manifested first of all in the Lord's passion, when from His side, pierced by the soldier's spear, flowed blood and water, so that the one side of the same person emitted two rivers of a different kind, that whosoever should believe and drink of both rivers might be filled with the Holy Spirit."

not only our Lord, but was the Son of the living God—was shown subsequently to have withstood the same Christ when He made announcement of His passion, and therefore was set forth as being called Satan. For no other reason except because it would come to pass that some, although varying in their own judgment, and somewhat halting in faith and doctrine, although they were **baptized in the name of Jesus**, yet, if they had been able to rescind their error in some interval of time, were not on that account cut off from salvation; but at any time that they had come to the right mind, obtained by repentance a sound hope of salvation, especially when they received the Holy Spirit, to be baptized by Whom is the duty of every man, they would have intended some such thing. Even as we do not apprehend that Peter in the Gospel suffered this alone, but all the disciples, to whom, though already baptized, the Lord afterwards says, that "all ye shall be offended in me," all of whom, as we observe, having amended their faith, were baptized after the Lord's resurrection with the Holy Spirit. So that not without reason we also in the present day may believe that men, amended from their former error, may be baptized in the Holy Spirit, who, although they were **baptized with water in the name of the Lord**, might have had a faith somewhat imperfect. Because it is of great importance whether a man is **not baptized at all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, or indeed whether in some respect he halts when he is baptized with the baptism of water, which is of less account provided that afterwards a sincere faith in the truth is evident in the baptism of the Spirit, which undoubtedly is of greater account. [On Rebaptism, ch 6] ... And for that reason, they who repent and are amended by the doctrine of the truth, and by their own faith, which subsequently has been improved by the purification of their heart, ought to be aided only by spiritual baptism, that is, by the imposition of the bishop's hands, and by the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the perfect seal of faith has been rightly accustomed to be given in this manner and on this principle in the Church. So that **the invocation of the name of Jesus**, which cannot be done away, may not seem to be held in disesteem by us; which assuredly is not fitting; although such an invocation, if none of those things of which we have spoken should follow it, may fail and be deprived of the effect of salvation. For when the apostle said that there was "one baptism," it must needs have been by the continued effect of the **invocation of the name of Jesus**, because, once invoked, it cannot be taken away by any man, even although we might venture, against the decision of the apostles, to repeat it by giving too much, yea, by the desire of superadding baptism. [On Rebaptism, ch 10] ... Wherefore the whole of this discussion must be considered, that it may be made clearer. For the **invocation of the name of Jesus** can only be an advantage if it shall be subsequently properly supplemented, because both prophets and apostles have so declared. For James says in the Acts of the Apostles: "Men and brethren, hearken: Simon hath declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will raise it up anew; that the residue of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called upon them, saith the Lord, who doeth these things." Therefore also the residue of men, that is, some of the Jews and all the Gentiles **upon whom the name of the Lord is called**, may and of necessity must seek the Lord, because **that very invocation of the name** affords them the opportunity, or even imposes on them the necessity, of seeking the Lord. And with these they prescribe the Holy Scriptures—whether all or only some of them—to discuss still more boldly concerning the truth than with the Gentiles **upon whom the name of the Lord Jesus**, the Son of the living God, **has not been invoked**, as it likewise has not upon the Jews who only receive the Old Testament Scriptures. And thus men of both of these kinds, that is, Jews and Gentiles, fully believing as they ought, are in like manner baptized. But heretics who are already **baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ** must only be baptized with the Holy Spirit; and in Jesus, which is "the only name given under heaven whereby we must be saved," death is reasonably despised, although, if they continue as they are, they cannot be saved, because **they have not sought the Lord after the invocation of His name upon them**, even as those who, on account of false Christs, perchance have refused to believe, of whom the Lord says, "Take heed that no man lead you into error. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall lead many into error." [On Rebaptism, ch 12] ... So that the same Spirit is, moreover, sometimes found to be upon those who are unworthy of Him; not certainly in vain or without reason, but for the sake of some needful operation; as He was upon Saul, upon whom came the Spirit of God, and he prophesied. However, in later days, after the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, and after a malign spirit from the Lord vexed him, because then he had come, after the messengers whom he had previously sent before with care, with intent to kill David; and they therefore fell into the chorus of the prophets, and they prophesied, so that they neither were able nor willing to do what they had been bidden. And we believe that the Spirit which was upon them all effected this with an admirable wisdom, by the will of God. Which Spirit also filled John the Baptist even from his mother's womb; and it fell upon those who were with Cornelius the centurion before they were baptized with water. Thus, cleaving to the baptism of men, the Holy Spirit either goes before or follows it; or failing the baptism of water, it falls upon those who believe. We are counselled that either we ought duly to maintain the integrity of baptism, or if by chance **baptism is given by any one in the name of Jesus Christ, we ought to supplement it, guarding the most holy invocation of the name of Jesus Christ**, as we have most abundantly set forth; guarding, moreover, the custom and authority which so much claim our veneration for so long a time and for such great men. [On Rebaptism, ch 15]

Notice that he spoke of “supplement[ing]” the baptism done INJC. Supplement it with what? Could he be referring to the triune formula? This is unlikely. An invocation of the triune formula would require a rebaptism, and the author was opposed to rebaptism. In chapter six, he argued that even the apostles had imperfect faith after they were baptized INJC, but this imperfection was mitigated by the baptism of the Spirit. The problem with these converts was not with their baptism, but with their faith. That problem will be fixed when their water baptism is supplemented with Spirit baptism.

In chapters six and seven, the author specifically addressed the apparent conflict of baptism in the name of Jesus with Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:19 to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. While he affirmed that there is no conflict, he doesn’t show how the two are to be reconciled. Instead, he seems to affirm that both are acceptable baptismal formulas. Indeed, he says of the triune formula that it “is true and right, and [is] to be observed by all means in the church, and moreover has been used to be observed.” This implies that using the triune formula was both a widespread and longstanding tradition, and one that the author approves of and practices himself (as evidenced by the fact that he continued on to say, “yet it behooves **us** to consider that invocation of the name of Jesus ought not to be thought futile by **us** on account of the veneration and power of that very name,” indicating that he includes himself as one who baptizes INFSHS). And yet, he does not think baptism INJC should be “thought futile...on account of the veneration and power of that name.” He ends by saying, “Therefore ought this invocation of the name of Jesus to be received as a certain beginning of the mystery of the Lord common to us and to all others, which may afterwards be filled up with the remaining things.” Filled up with what? What are the remaining things? Again, I don’t think he is referring to the triune formula. Not only would the administration of the triune formula require the very thing the author opposed (rebaptism), but the author previously made it clear that baptism INJC should not be considered futile. And finally, as I noted in the previous paragraph, the context favors interpreting the “remaining” things as a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

For not for any other reason Peter—who had already been baptized and had been asked what he thought of the Lord by the Lord Himself, and the truth of the revelation of the Father in heaven being bestowed on him had confessed that Christ was not only our Lord, but was the Son of the living God—was shown subsequently to have withstood the same Christ when He made announcement of His passion, and therefore was set forth as being called Satan. For no other reason except because it would come to pass that some, although varying in their own judgment, and somewhat halting in faith and doctrine, although they were **baptized in the name of Jesus**, yet, if they had been able to rescind their error in some interval of time, were not on that account cut off from salvation; but at any time that they had come to the right mind, obtained by repentance a sound hope of salvation, especially when they received the Holy Spirit, to be baptized by Whom is the duty of every man, they would have intended some such thing. Even as we do not apprehend that Peter in the Gospel suffered this alone, but all the disciples, to whom, though already baptized, the Lord afterwards says, that “all ye shall be offended in me,” all of whom, as we observe, having amended their faith, were baptized after the Lord’s resurrection with the Holy Spirit. So that not without reason we also in the present day may believe that men, amended from their former error, may be baptized in the Holy Spirit, who, although they were **baptized with water in the name of the Lord**, might have had a faith somewhat imperfect. Because it is of great importance whether a man is **not baptized at all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, or indeed whether in some respect he halts when he is baptized with the baptism of water, which is of less account provided that afterwards a sincere faith in the truth is evident in the baptism of the Spirit, which undoubtedly is of greater account. 7. Neither must you esteem what our Lord said as being contrary to this treatment: “Go ye, teach the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Because, **although this is true and right, and to be observed by all means in the Church, and moreover has been used to be observed**, yet it behoves us to consider that **invocation of the name of Jesus** ought not to be thought futile by us on account of the veneration and power of that very name, in which name all kinds of power are accustomed to be exercised, and occasionally some even by men outside the Church. But to what effect are those words of Christ, who said that He would deny, and not know, those who should say to Him in the day of judgment, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name cast out demons, and in Thy name done many wonderful works,” when He answered them, even with emphasis, “I never knew you; depart from me, ye who work iniquity,” unless that it should be shown to us, that even by those who work iniquity might these good works also be done, by the superfluous energy of the name of Christ? Therefore ought this **invocation of the name of Jesus** to be received as a certain beginning of the

mystery of the Lord common to us and to all others, which may afterwards be filled up with the remaining things. –
On Rebaptism, ch 6-7

This work affirms that INJC was being used as a baptismal formula in the third century by at least some groups deemed to be heretical by the orthodox. While the author considers this a valid way of being baptized (seeing no conflict between the INJC and INFHS formulas), he did not use that formula when baptizing. He used the INFHS formula, and indicates that this was the way all the institutional churches baptized, and had done so for a long time.²⁹

Cyprian of Carthage

Cyprian wrote Epistle 22 to the Roman clergy around A.D. 250. He contrasted baptism in the triune name according to Matthew 28:19 with those who baptize in the name of Paulus. The only way one would know the difference is if both were being used as baptismal formulas. This argues for the triune formula being used as a baptismal formula in the third century in North Africa and Rome:

Finally, this seditious practice has already begun to appear; for in our province, through some of its cities, an attack has been made by the multitude upon their rulers, and they have compelled that peace to be given to them immediately which they all cried out had been once given to them by the martyrs and confessors. Their rulers, being frightened and subdued, were of little avail to resist them, either by vigour of mind or by strength of faith. With us, moreover, some turbulent spirits, who in time past were with difficulty governed by me, and were delayed till my coming, were inflamed by this letter as if by a firebrand, and began to be more violent, and to extort the peace granted to them. I have sent a copy to you of the letters that I wrote to my clergy about these matters, and, moreover, what Caldonius, my colleague, of his integrity and faithfulness wrote, and what I replied to him. I have sent both to you to read. Copies also of the letter of Celerinus, the good and stout confessor, which he wrote to Lucian the same confessor-also what Lucian replied to him, I have sent to you; that you may know both my labour in respect of everything, and my diligence, and might learn the truth itself, how moderate and cautious is Celerinus the confessor, and how reverent both in his humility and fear for our faith; while Lucian, as I have said, is less skilful concerning the understanding of the Lord's word, and by his facility, is mischievous on account of the dislike that he causes for my reverential dealing. For while **the Lord has said that the nations are to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**, and their past sins are to be done away in baptism; **this man**, ignorant of the precept and of the law, **commands peace to be granted and sins to be done away in the name of Paulus**; and he says that this was commanded him by Paulus, as you will observe in the letter sent by the same Lucian to Celerinus, in which he very little considered that it is not martyrs that make the Gospel, but that martyrs are made by the Gospel. – Cyprian, Epistle 22.3³⁰

As previously mentioned, Cyprian was the chief advocate in the Rebaptism Controversy for rebaptizing heretics who came to embrace orthodoxy. He addressed this in a personal letter to Jubaianus in A.D. 256, speaking of heretics who were “already baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” It is not clear whether he is referring to a baptismal formula or not. He names six heretical groups in the letter. I do not know enough about each group to know whether all of them baptized using the INJC formula, but at least the Patripassians did. They were Modalists; the forbearers of modern Oneness Theology. It could be, then, that Cyprian was referring to a baptismal formula practiced by these heretical groups. Whatever the case might be, he did not consider their baptism to be effective if they did not share the

²⁹Cyprian was the most vocal advocate of the rebaptism view – the view being opposed by *On Rebaptism*. As such, the arguments in *On Rebaptism* are likely being directed at Cyprian. We know Cyprian baptized INFHS, and thus some have argued that if the author of *On Rebaptism* disagreed with Cyril's baptismal formula, he would have made it a point of contention in *On Rebaptism*. Since he did not, then the author must have agreed with Cyprian's view of the baptismal formula.

I don't find this line of reasoning persuasive. First, the author affirms baptism INJC numerous times. Secondly, he does address the different baptismal formulas and affirms both. While the author may have preferred the INJC formula, he was fine with the INFHS formula as well.

³⁰<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-05/anf05-47.htm>

orthodox faith by “confess[ing] the same Father, the same Son, the same Holy Ghost.” In other words, if they did not believe in the Trinity when they were baptized, then their baptism is not the true baptism:

Certainly, since I found in the letter the copy of which you transmitted to me, that it was written, "That it should not be asked who baptized, since he who is baptized might receive remission of sins according to what he believed," I thought that this topic was not to be passed by, especially since I observed in the same epistle that mention was also made of Marcion, saying that "even those that came from him did not need to be baptized, because they seemed to have been already **baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.**" Therefore we ought to consider their faith who believe without, whether in respect of the same faith they can obtain any grace. For if we and heretics have one faith, we may also have one grace. If the Patripassians, Anthropians, Valentinians, Apelletians, Ophites, Marcionites, and other pests, and swords, and poisons of heretics for subverting the truth, **confess the same Father, the same Son, the same Holy Ghost**, the same Church with us, they may also have one baptism if they have also one faith. – Cyprian, Letter to Jubaianus (Letter 72), ch 4³¹

Cyprian goes on to mention Matthew 28:19 and the triune formula, saying that Jesus commanded the nations to be baptized into “the Trinity:”

And lest it should be wearisome to go through all the heresies, and to enumerate either the follies or the madness of each of them, because it is no pleasure to speak of that which one either dreads or is ashamed to know, let us examine in the meantime about Marcion alone, the mention of whom has been made in the letter transmitted by you to us, whether the ground of his baptism can be made good. For the Lord after His resurrection, sending His disciples, instructed and taught them in what manner they ought to baptize, 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.**" He suggests the Trinity, in whose sacrament the nations were to be baptized. Does Marcion then maintain the Trinity? Does he then assert the same Father, the Creator, as we do? Does he know the same Son, Christ born of the Virgin Mary, who as the Word was made flesh, who bare our sins, who conquered death by dying, who by Himself first of all originated the resurrection of the flesh, and showed to His disciples that He had risen in the same flesh? Widely different is the faith with Marcion, and, moreover, with the other heretics nay, with them there is nothing but perfidy, and blasphemy, and contention, which is hostile to holiness and truth. How then can one who is baptized among them seem to have obtained [re]mission of sins, and the grace of the divine mercy, by his faith, when he has not the truth of the faith itself? For if, as some suppose, one could receive anything abroad out of the Church according to his faith, certainly he has received what he believed; but if he believes what is false, he could not receive what is true; but rather he has received things adulterous and profane, according to what he believed. – Cyprian, Letter to Jubaianus (Letter 72), ch 5

He goes on to talk about the difference between baptism INJC and baptism INFSHS, arguing that while the former formula was acceptable for the Jews because they already believed in the Father, the Gentiles needed to be baptized in the full triune formula. As such, the Marcionites who converted to orthodoxy who were only baptized in the name of Jesus needed to be rebaptized into the name of the Trinity. His argument presumes an oral invocation of some baptismal formula:

... Besides, it is one thing for those who are within the Church to speak concerning the name of Christ; it is another for those who are without, and act in opposition to the Church, to baptize in the name of Christ. Wherefore, let not those who favour heretics put forward what Paul spoke concerning brethren, but let them show if he thought anything was to be conceded to the heretic, or if he approved of their faith or baptism, or if he appointed that perfidious and blasphemous men could receive remission of their sins outside the Church. ... Again, there is no ground for any one, for the circumvention of Christian truth, opposing to us the name of Christ, and saying, "All who are **baptized** everywhere, and in any manner, **in the name of Jesus Christ**, have obtained the grace of baptism," when Christ Himself speaks, and says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." ... Since, therefore, from the preaching and testimony of Christ Himself, the Father who sent must be first known, then afterwards Christ, who was sent, and there cannot be a hope of salvation except by knowing the two together; **how, when God the Father is not known, nay, is even blasphemed, can they who among the heretics are said to be baptized in the name of Christ, be judged to have obtained the remission of sins?** For the case of the Jews under the apostles was one, but the condition of the Gentiles is another. **The former, because they had already gained the most ancient baptism of the law and Moses, were to be baptized also in the name of Jesus Christ, in**

³¹<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-05/anf05-97.htm>.

conformity with what Peter tells them in the Acts of the Apostles, saying, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For this 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." Peter makes mention of Jesus Christ, not as though the Father should be omitted, but that the Son also might be joined to the Father. **Finally, when, after the resurrection, the apostles are sent by the Lord to the heathens, they are bidden to baptize the Gentiles "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."** How, then, do some say, that a Gentile baptized without, outside the Church, yea, and in opposition to the Church, so that it be only in the name of Jesus Christ, everywhere, and in whatever manner, can obtain remission of sin, when Christ Himself commands the heathen to be baptized in the full and united Trinity? Unless while one who denies Christ is denied by Christ, he who denies His Father whom Christ Himself confessed is not denied; and he who blasphemes against Him whom Christ called His Lord and His God, is rewarded by Christ, and obtains remission of sins, and the sanctification of baptism! But by what power can he who denies God the Creator, the Father of Christ, obtain, in baptism, the remission of sins, since Christ received that very power by which we are baptized and sanctified, from the same Father, whom He called "greater" than Himself, by whom He desired to be glorified, whose will He fulfilled even unto the obedience of drinking the cup, and of undergoing death? What else is it then, than to become a partaker with blaspheming heretics, to wish to maintain and assert, that one who blasphemes and gravely sins against the Father and the Lord and God of Christ, can **receive remission of sins in the name of Christ?** What, moreover, is that, and of what kind is it, that he who denies the Son of God has not the Father, and he who denies the Father should be thought to have the Son, although the Son Himself testifies, and says, "No man can come unto me except it were given unto him of my Father?" So that it is evident, that **no remission of sins can be received in baptism from the Son, which it is not plain that the Father has granted.** Especially, since He further repeats, and says, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." – Cyprian, Letter to Jubaianus (Letter 72), ch 14,16-18

Interestingly, Cyprian did not try to harmonize the two phrases as if one were a formula while the other was not. Cyprian acknowledged both INJC and INFSHS as baptismal formulas, and thought both were valid in different circumstances for different groups of people. The INJC formula was acceptable for Jews who already confessed the Father and Spirit, whereas the INFSHS formula was required for the Gentiles who did not previously know any members of the Trinity. It's possible that Cyprian did not see them as different baptismal formulas, but as a shorter version and a longer version of the same formula (with the Jesus' name formula being a short-hand version of the triune formula). I find this unlikely, however, since Cyprian argues for one (INFSHS) over the other (INJC).

While Cyprian thought it was proper for Peter to baptize the Jews of his day in the name of Jesus only, it is not clear that Cyprian thought it was still appropriate in his day to baptize Jews in the name of Jesus. Even if he did, given the fact that most converts were Gentiles in Cyprian's day, he would surely say that almost everyone should be baptized in the triune formula.

In his *Letter to Pompey* (Letter 73), Cyprian argued that being baptized INJC is not sufficient for salvation, as if merely invoking the name of Jesus makes baptism effective.³² After all, he argues, no one thinks these same heretics were actually filled with the Spirit when hands were laid on them in the name of Jesus by the heretic leaders since they reject the Trinity. If invoking the name of Jesus during the laying on of hands did not result in them being filled with the Spirit, why think invoking the name of Jesus during baptism results in them being forgiven of their sins? Therefore, they ought to be rebaptized and have hands laid on them again by the catholic church. It's interesting that Cyprian did not argue that their baptism was ineffective because they used the wrong baptismal formula, but rather because both the baptizer and the baptizand rejected the Trinity (which, arguably, is why they used the INJC formula instead of the INFSHS formula):

Or if they attribute the effect of baptism to the majesty of the name, so that they who are baptized anywhere and anyhow, in the name of Jesus Christ, are judged to be renewed and sanctified; wherefore, in the name of the same

³²Cyprian does not use the word "invoke," but how else would the "majesty of the name" be thought to be effective in baptism unless the name were being invoked in baptism.

Christ, are not hands laid upon the baptized persons among them, for the reception of the Holy Spirit? Why does not the same majesty of the same name avail in the imposition of hands, which, they contend, availed in the sanctification of baptism? ... But further, one is not born by the imposition of hands when he receives the Holy Ghost, but in baptism, that so, being already born, he may receive the Holy Spirit, even as it happened in the first man Adam. For first God formed him, and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. For the Spirit cannot be received, unless he who receives first have an existence. But as the birth of Christians is in baptism, while the generation and sanctification of baptism are with the spouse of Christ alone, who is able spiritually to conceive and to bear sons to God, where and of whom and to whom is he born, who is not a son of the Church, so as that he should have God as his Father, before he has had the Church for his Mother? But as no heresy at all, and equally no schism, being without, can have the sanctification of saving baptism, **why has the bitter obstinacy of our brother Stephen broken forth to such an extent, as to contend that sons are born to God from the baptism of Marcion; moreover, of Valentinus and Apelles, and of others who blaspheme against God the Father; and to say that remission of sins is granted in the name of Jesus Christ where blasphemy is uttered against the Father and against Christ the Lord God?**

– Cyprian, Letter to Pompey (Epistle 73), 5,7³³

While my sense of this passage is that Cyprian was referring to a formula, one could argue that it's unlikely that the name of Jesus was orally invoked during the laying on of hands, and thus it's unlikely that Cyprian was referring to a formula with reference to baptism. However, I see no reason to think Cyprian is not referring to an oral invocation of the name of Jesus associated with the laying on of hands. Indeed, I would argue the opposite way: Since Cyprian seems to be referring to a formula with reference to baptism, and he sees a symmetry between baptism and the laying on of hands, the early church invoked the name of Jesus when laying hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit as well.

Firmilian

In A.D. 256, Firmilian, bishop of Caesarea, wrote an epistle to Cyprian concerning the baptism of heretics. He speaks of heretics being baptized in the name of Christ, having hands laid on them to receive the Holy Spirit in the name of Christ, and doing other unspecified things in the name of Christ. It's not clear whether Firmilian is using the name of Christ as a baptismal formula or not. If he had only spoken of the name of Christ in association with baptism and the laying on of hands, then I would argue, as I did regarding Cyprian, that a formula is probably in view; however, when he speaks of "other things" that heretics do "in the name of Christ," it's hard to see what other things they would do that would involve a formulaic invocation. If those "other things" do not involve a formula, it casts doubt on understanding "in the name of Christ" to be a formula with reference to baptism and the laying on of hands. Having expressed some level of uncertainty, I would still contend that Firmilian is most likely referring to INJC as a baptismal formula. How else could "the name of Christ" be "of great advantage to faith and the sanctification of baptism" and "obtain[ing] the grace of Christ" if the name of Christ was not orally invoked during baptism? To see the naming of Christ as aiding personal faith and effecting the grace of God, surely the name of Christ must have been invoked over the baptizand. Furthermore, why would Stephen see the baptism of heretics as different from the baptism of the institutional church if they were not using a different formula?:

But, says he [Stephen I of Rome], "the name of Christ is of great advantage to faith and the sanctification of baptism; so that **whosoever is anywhere so-ever baptized in the name of Christ, immediately obtains the grace of Christ.**" Although this position may be briefly met and answered, that if **baptism without in the name of Christ** availed for the cleansing of man; **in the name of the same Christ**, the imposition of hands might avail also for the reception of the Holy Spirit; **and the other things also which are done among heretics will begin to seem just and lawful when they are done in the name of Christ**; as you have maintained in your letter that the name of Christ could be of no avail except in the Church alone, to which alone Christ has conceded the power of heavenly grace. – Firmilian, Epistle 74, 18.³⁴

³³<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-05/anf05-98.htm>

³⁴<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-05/anf05-99.htm>

Seventh Council of Carthage

At the Seventh Council of Carthage in A.D. 258, we are provided with the statements of 87 bishops regarding the rebaptism of heretics. All took the position of Cyprian that heretics needed to be rebaptized. Caecilius of Bilita compared heretics baptizing in the name of Christ to the Antichrist baptizing in the name of Christ, but he is not clearing using the name of Christ as a baptismal formula:

Caecilius of Bilita said: I know only one baptism in the Church, and none out of the Church. This one will be here, where there is the true hope and the certain faith. For thus it is written: "One faith, one hope, one baptism;" not among heretics, where there is no hope, and the faith is false, where all things are carried on by lying; where a demoniac exorcises; where one whose mouth and words send forth a cancer puts the sacramental interrogation; the faithless gives faith; the wicked bestows pardon of sins; and **Antichrist baptizes in the name of Christ**; he who is cursed of God blesses; he who is dead promises life; he who is unpeaceful gives peace; the blasphemer calls upon God; the profane person administers the office of the priesthood; the sacrilegious person establishes an altar.³⁵

Hortensianus of Lares also made mention of people being baptized in the name of Jesus, but once again, it's not clear that he was referring to a baptismal formula:

Hortensianus of Lares said: Let either these presumptuous ones, or those who favour heretics, consider how many baptisms there are. **We claim for the Church one baptism**, which we know not except in the Church. Or how can they **baptize any one in the name of Christ**, whom Christ Himself declares to be His adversaries?

Finally, Munnulus of Girba spoke of the "Trinity of baptism," associating this with Jesus' triune formula in Matthew 28:19. It's not clear to me whether "the Trinity of baptism" refers to the practice of triple immersion into each name of the Trinity, or if he's just referring to the association of the names of the Trinity with baptism. Either way, it's not clear that he has a baptismal formula in view:

Munnulus of Girba said: **The truth of our Mother the Catholic Church, brethren, hath always remained and still remains with us, and even especially in the Trinity of baptism, as our Lord says, "Go ye and baptize the nations, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."** Since, then, we manifestly know that heretics have not either Father, or Son, or Holy Spirit, they ought, when they come to the Church our Mother, truly to be born again and to be baptized; that the cancer which they had, and the anger of damnation, and the witchery of error, may be sanctified by the holy and heavenly layer.

Basil the Great

Basil wrote his treatise, *On the Holy Spirit*, around the year A.D. 375. He addressed those who think it is sufficient to baptize in the name of the Father alone on the basis that Scripture provides examples of people being baptized in the name of Jesus only. Basil asserts that when the name of Jesus was named in baptism, the Father and Son were implicitly named as well. As such, we ought to explicitly baptize in the complete triune name. It's clear that he sees the triune phrase as a baptismal formula because he speaks of "the invocation of the names" and "the naming of Christ:"

Against those who assert that the baptism in the name of the Father alone is sufficient. Let no one be misled by the fact of the apostle's frequently omitting the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit when making mention of baptism, or on this account imagine that the invocation of the names is not observed. "As many of you," he says, "as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ;" and again, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death." **For the naming of Christ is the confession of the whole**, shewing forth as it does the God who gave, the Son who received, and the Spirit who is, the unction. So we have learned from Peter, in the Acts, of "Jesus of Nazareth whom God anointed with the Holy Ghost; and in Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me;" and the Psalmist, "Therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Scripture, however, in the case of baptism, sometimes plainly mentions the Spirit alone. "For into one Spirit," it says, "we were all baptized in one body." And in harmony with this are the passages: "You shalt [sic] be baptized with the Holy Ghost," and "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." But no one on this account would be justified in calling that baptism a perfect baptism wherein only the name of the Spirit was invoked. For the tradition

³⁵<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-05/anf05-124.htm>

that has been given us by the quickening grace must remain forever inviolate. He who redeemed our life from destruction gave us power of renewal, whereof the cause is ineffable and hidden in mystery, but bringing great salvation to our souls, so that to add or to take away anything involves manifestly a falling away from the life everlasting. **If then in baptism the separation of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is perilous to the baptizer, and of no advantage to the baptized, how can the rending asunder of the Spirit from Father and from Son be safe for us?** Faith and baptism are two kindred and inseparable ways of salvation: faith is perfected through baptism, baptism is established through faith, and both are completed by the same names. **For as we believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, so are we also baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost;** first comes the confession, introducing us to salvation, and baptism follows, setting the seal upon our assent. – Basil, On the Holy Spirit, ch 12³⁶

Around the same time, Basil wrote a letter to Amphilochius of Iconium to discuss the Holy Spirit. In that letter, Basil addressed the argument of the Sabellians who said baptism should be done in a single name (presumably Jesus given their Modalistic theology) on the basis that Jesus said “name” rather than “names” in Matthew 28:19. Basil argued that Jesus was referring to the one nature of the Godhead, not a single name to be (presumably) spoken in baptism:

There is going on among you a movement ruinous to the faith, disloyal to the apostolical and evangelical dogmas, disloyal too to the tradition of Gregory the truly great, and of his successors up to the blessed Musonius, whose teaching is still ringing in your ears. For those men, who, from fear of confutation, are forging figments against me, are endeavouring to renew the old mischief of Sabellius, started long ago, and extinguished by the tradition of the great Gregory. But do you bid goodbye to those wine-laden heads, bemuddled by the swelling fumes that mount from their debauch, and from me who am wide awake and from fear of God cannot keep silence. Hear what plague is rife among you. Sabellianism is Judaism imported into the preaching of the Gospel under the guise of Christianity. For if a man calls Father Son and Holy Ghost one thing of many faces, and makes the hypostasis of the three one, what is this but to deny the everlasting pre-existence of the Only begotten? He denies too the Lord's sojourn among men in the incarnation, the going down into hell, the resurrection, the judgment; he denies also the proper operations of the Spirit. And I hear that even rasher innovations than those of the foolish Sabellius are now ventured on among you. It is said, and that on the evidence of ear witnesses, that your clever men go to such an extreme as to say that there is no tradition of the name of the Only-begotten, while of the name of the adversary there is; and at this they are highly delighted and elated, as though it were a discovery of their own. For it is said, "I came in my Father's name and ye received me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." **And because it is said, "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," it is obvious, they urge, that the name is one, for it is not "in the names," but "in the name."** 4. I blush so to write to you, for the men thus guilty are of my own blood; and I groan for my own soul, in that, like boxers fighting two men at once, I can only give the truth its proper force by hitting with my proofs, and knocking down, the errors of doctrine on the right and on the left. On one side I am attacked by the Anomoean: on the other by the Sabellian. Do not, I implore you, pay any attention to these abominable and impotent sophisms. **Know that the name of Christ which is above every name is His being called Son of God, as Peter says, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." And as to the words "I came in my Father's name," it is to be understood that He so says describing His Father as origin and cause of Himself. And if it is said "Go and baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," we must not suppose that here one name is delivered to us.** For just as he who said Paul and Silvanus and Timothy mentioned three names, and coupled them one to the other by the word "and," so **He who spoke of the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," mentioned three, and united them by the conjunction, teaching that with each name must be understood its own proper meaning; for the names mean things.** And no one gifted with even the smallest particle of it intelligence doubts that the existence belonging to the things is peculiar and complete in itself. **For of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost there is the same nature and one Godhead; but these are different names, setting forth to a us the circumscription and exactitude of the meanings.** For unless the meaning of the distinctive qualities of each be unconfounded, it is impossible for the doxology to be adequately offered to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. – Basil the Great, Letter 210, 3-4³⁷

³⁶<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF2-08/Npnf2-08-06.htm>

³⁷<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF2-08/Npnf2-08-228.htm>

Summary

We have eight witnesses and 14 documents that speak to the baptismal formula in the third century. This is a significant increase in data over what we have from the second century. Once again, we don't find any authors denying the use of a baptismal formula, or any debates occurring over silent baptism.

Five authors refer to being baptized INJC (On Rebaptism, Cyprian, Firmilian, Seventh Council of Carthage, Basil), and three spoke of baptism using both INFSHS and INJC language (On Rebaptism, Cyprian, Seventh Council of Carthage). Only two of these four authors clearly thought of INJC as a baptismal formula (On Rebaptism, Cyprian). Both Cyprian and the author of *On Rebaptism* thought the Jesus' name formula was an acceptable baptismal formula, but Cyprian seems to limit the acceptability of its use to Jews in the first century while the author of *On Rebaptism* thought it was acceptable – though not preferable – to use it in his own day. Firmilian seems to indicate that Stephen I of Rome found the INJC formula acceptable, as indicated by the fact that he did not require heretics who used that formula to be rebaptized using the INFSHS formula when they abandoned their heresy in favor of orthodoxy.

Four authors (five documents) addressed the apparent conflict between baptism INJC and INFSHS (Origen, On Rebaptism, Cyprian, Basil). Four works indicate that it was the heretics, not the orthodox, who baptized this way (On Rebaptism, Cyprian, Firmilian, Seventh Council of Carthage). This is in contrast to the second century when baptism of the institutional church was described as being in the name of Jesus (although they do not appear to have used this phrase as a baptismal formula).

One document cites Matthew 28:19 in the context of baptism, but does not clearly identify it as a baptismal formula (Seventh Council of Carthage). Five authors (seven documents) explicitly state or imply that the triune formula was used in North Africa, Egypt, Rome, and Israel (Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen, Cyprian, Basil). On Rebaptism even describes this as the traditional formula. It's clear, then, that by the end of the third century, the triune formula was the dominant formula used by the orthodox, while some groups considered heretical baptized using the Jesus' name formula.

4th Century

The Council of Arles

The Council of Arles was a local council called by Emperor Constantine I in A.D. 314 to resolve the Donatist controversy in the churches of North Africa. That controversy pertained to the status of Christians who denied the faith or handed over Scriptures during the persecution of Diocletian. The council covered other matters as well, including the issue of rebaptism for heretics (Rebaptism Controversy). As you'll recall, Cyprian took the position that heretics should be rebaptized. Cyprian was bishop in Carthage in North Africa, so it should be no surprise that the churches in North Africa continued to follow Cyprian in the early fourth century. And yet, canon eight of the Council of Arles reversed this tradition, prohibiting rebaptism of heretics who confess the Trinity:

Concerning the Africans who use their own special law in that they practice rebaptism, it is resolved that if any come to the church from heresy, they question him on the creed (used at his baptism), and if they consider him to have been **baptized into the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**, let him only receive the laying on of hands so that he receive the Holy Spirit; but if when questioned he does not solemnly **confess this Trinity**, let him be baptized.³⁸

If the former heretic confessed a sufficiently orthodox creed when he was baptized (one that reflects a Trinitarian understanding of God), and if his questioners "consider him to have been baptized into the

³⁸<https://www.fourthcentury.com/arles-314-canons/>

Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” he should not be rebaptized. Is the council referring to an actual baptismal formula that was used? While by itself, the phrase is a bit ambiguous, the canon goes on to talk about the former heretic “confess[ing] the Trinity.” These appear to be parallel statements. One is baptized into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit if one confesses the Trinity. Could it be, then, that this canon is not referring to a baptismal formula, but rather what the former heretic believed when he was baptized?: If he believed in the Trinity when He was baptized, then his baptism was valid; If he did not believe in the Trinity when he was baptized, then his baptism was not valid.

This does not appear to be the case. Notice the last line: “but if when questioned he does not solemnly confess this Trinity, let him be baptized.” If this were referring to what the former heretic *believes*, then the canon would be directing the churches to rebaptize those who do not believe in the Trinity. But if they do not believe in the Trinity, they would be denying orthodoxy and embracing heresy, and thus be ineligible for rebaptism. That means, then, that the text cannot be referring to what the former heretic believes, but rather to how he was baptized. It is referring to the baptismal formula that was used when he was baptized in his days as a heretic. If he was baptized using the triune formula, then there was no need to rebaptize him. If he was not baptized with the triune formula, then he needed to be rebaptized. One might wonder how a person would have been baptized if they were not baptized using the triune formula. While the text does not say, given what we know from other texts about the baptismal practices of those deemed to be heretical, it may be that they were using the Jesus’ name formula.

Pseudo-Clement

Pseudo-Clement (a work false attributed to Clement of Rome) was written in the early decades of the fourth century by Syrian Christians. The author says one must be baptized “in the name of the threefold blessedness as the true Prophet taught,” almost certainly referring to Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:19. As such, he seems to be referring to a verbal invocation of the triune formula. And yet, moments later he speaks of those who recognized their need to be baptized in the name of Jesus. The author does not seem to recognize any tension between his two statements, as though they are competing baptismal formulas that require explanation:

For he showed that two advents of Him are foretold: one in humiliation, which He has accomplished; the other in glory, which is hoped for to be accomplished, when He shall come to give the kingdom to those who believe in Him, and who observe all things which He has commanded. And when he had plainly taught the people concerning these things, he added this also: **That unless a man be baptized in water, in the name of the threefold blessedness, as the true Prophet taught, he can neither receive remission of sins nor enter into the kingdom of heaven;** and he declared that this is the prescription of the unbegotten God ... When I entered the city, our most beloved brother Zacchaeus met me; and embracing me, brought me to this lodging, in which he himself stayed, inquiring of me concerning each of the brethren, especially concerning our honourable brother James. And when I told him that he was still lame on one foot, on his immediately asking the cause of this, I related to him all that I have now detailed to you, how we had been called by the priests and Caiaphas the high priest to the temple, and how James the archbishop, standing on the top of the steps, had for seven successive days shown the whole people from the Scriptures of the Lord that Jesus is the Christ; and how, when all were acquiescing that they should be **baptized by him in the name of Jesus**, an enemy did all those things which I have already mentioned, and which I need not repeat.” – Pseudo Clement, *Recognitions*, book 1, ch 69,73³⁹

It is clear from another passage, however, that he believed the triune formula was the baptismal formula to be “invoked” over the baptizand:

When he had given them these and such like precepts, he made proclamation to the people, saying: Since I have resolved to stay three months with you, if any one desires it, let him be baptized; that, stripped of his former evils, he may for the future, in consequence of his own conduct, become heir of heavenly blessings, as a reward for his good

³⁹<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-08/anf08-31.htm>

actions. Whosoever will, then, let him come to Zacchæus and give his name to him, and let him hear from him the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Let him attend to frequent fastings, and approve himself in all things, that at the end of these three months he may be baptized on the day of the festival. **But every one of you shall be baptized in ever flowing waters, the name of the Trine Beatitude being invoked over him;** he being first anointed with oil sanctified by prayer, that so at length, being consecrated by these things, he may attain a perception of holy things. – Pseudo Clement, *Recognitions*, book 3, ch 67⁴⁰

And again, he speaks of those who are baptized “under the name of the threefold sacrament:”

But you will perhaps say, What does the baptism of water contribute towards the worship of God? In the first place, because that which has pleased God is fulfilled. In the second place, because, when you are regenerated and born again of water and of God, the frailty of your former birth, which you have through men, is cut off, and so at length you shall be able to attain salvation; but otherwise it is impossible. For thus has the true prophet testified to us with an oath: “Verily I say to you, That unless a man is born again of water, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Therefore make haste; for there is in these waters a certain power of mercy which was borne upon them at the beginning, and acknowledges **those who are baptized under the name of the threefold sacrament**, and rescues them from future punishments, presenting as a gift to God the souls that are consecrated by baptism. – Pseudo Clement, *Recognitions*, book 6, ch 9

The same passage appears in a similar form In Pseudo-Clement’s *Homilies*, but it is even clearer there that he is referring to a baptismal formula because he speaks of it as a “thrice blessed invocation:”

For thus the prophet has sworn to us, saying, Verily I say to you, Unless ye be regenerated by living water into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Wherefore approach. For there is there something that is merciful from the beginning, borne upon the water, and rescues from the future punishment those who are **baptized with the thrice blessed invocation**, offering as gifts to God the good deeds of the baptized whenever they are done after their baptism. – Pseudo Clement, *Homilies*, book 11, ch 26⁴¹

In other contexts, however, in which he isn’t talking about the baptismal ceremony, he would speak of baptism “on the invocation of His name,” “baptized in His name,” and “baptized...in the name of Jesus:”

But when the time began to draw near that what was wanting in the Mosaic institutions should be supplied, as we have said, and that the Prophet should appear, of whom he had foretold that He should warn them by the mercy of God to cease from sacrificing; lest haply they might suppose that on the cessation of sacrifice there was no remission of sins for them, **He instituted baptism by water** among them, in which they might be **absolved from all their sins on the invocation of His name**, and for the future, following a perfect life, might abide in immortality, being purified not by the blood of beasts, but by the purification of the Wisdom of God. Subsequently also an evident proof of this great mystery is supplied in the fact, that **every one who, believing in this Prophet who had been foretold by Moses, is baptized in His name**, shall be kept unhurt from the destruction of war which impends over the unbelieving nation, and the place itself; but that those who do not believe shall be made exiles from their place and kingdom, that even against their will they may understand and obey the will of God. ... When I entered the city, our most beloved brother Zacchæus met me; and embracing me, brought me to this lodging, in which he himself stayed, inquiring of me concerning each of the brethren, especially concerning our honourable brother James. And when I told him that he was still lame on one foot, on his immediately asking the cause of this, I related to him all that I have now detailed to you, how we had been called by the priests and Caiaphas the high priest to the temple, and how James the archbishop, standing on the top of the steps, had for seven successive days shown the whole people from the Scriptures of the Lord that Jesus is the Christ; and how, when all were acquiescing that they should be **baptized by him in the name of Jesus**, an enemy did all those things which I have already mentioned, and which I need not repeat." – Pseudo Clement, *Recognitions*, book 1, ch 39,73⁴²

Pseudo-Clement, then, does not see any contradiction between INJC and INFSHS, even though he appears to have only used the latter as a baptismal formula.

⁴⁰<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/080403.htm>

⁴¹<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/080811.htm>

⁴²<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/080401.htm>

Cyril of Jerusalem

Around A.D. 348 or 350, Cyril wrote his *Catechetical Lectures* for those who were preparing for baptism. In one place, it is the catechumens who are asked to confess the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in baptism, but in another place, Cyril indicates that the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit is invoked over the baptizand. Perhaps the invocation of the triune phrase was made in the form of a question, to which the baptizand would affirm that he believed in the Father, Son, and Spirit. However this was worked out in practice, it's clear that the triune formula was being used in Jerusalem in the fourth century:

Regard not the Laver as simple water, but rather regard the spiritual grace that is given with the water. For just as the offerings brought to the heathen altars, though simple in their nature, become defiled by the invocation of the idols, so contrariwise **the simple water having received the invocation of the Holy Ghost, and of Christ, and of the Father, acquires a new power of holiness.** [Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 3:3] ... After these things, you were led to the holy pool of Divine Baptism, as Christ was carried from the Cross to the Sepulchre which is before our eyes. **And each of you was asked, whether he believed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and you made that saving confession, and descended three times into the water, and ascended again;** here also hinting by a symbol at the three days burial of Christ. For as our Saviour passed three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, so you also in your first ascent out of the water, represented the first day of Christ in the earth, and by your descent, the night; for as he who is in the night, no longer sees, but he who is in the day, remains in the light, so in the descent, as in the night, you saw nothing, but in ascending again you were as in the day. And at the self-same moment you were both dying and being born; and that Water of salvation was at once your grave and your mother. – Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 20:4⁴³

Hilary of Poitiers

Hilary's most famous work is *On the Trinity*, written in A.D. 359 or 360. Not only does he speak of baptism INFSHS, but he refers to "the words that are used," making it clear that he has a baptismal formula in view. This means the triune formula was being used in France no later than the fourth century:

Thus, after the present first book, the second expounds the mystery of the Divine birth, that those who shall be **baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost** may know the true Names, and not be perplexed about their sense but accurately informed as to fact and meaning, and so receive **full assurance that in the words which are used they have the true Names**, and that those Names involve the truth. – Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, book 1, 21⁴⁴

Also in A.D. 359, in *On the Councils*, Hilary appears to address the singularity of "name" in Matthew 28:19, saying it signifies that the three persons of the Trinity are one in agreement:

"And in the Holy Ghost, who was given to them that believe, to comfort, sanctify and perfect, even as our Lord Jesus Christ ordained His disciples, saying, *Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, manifestly, that is, of a Father who is truly Father, and clearly of a Son who is truly Son, and a Holy Ghost who is truly a Holy Ghost, these words not being set forth idly and without meaning, but carefully signifying the Person, and order, and glory of each of those who are named, **to teach us that they are three Persons, but in agreement one.** – Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Councils, or The Faith of the Easterns*, 29⁴⁵

Hilary goes on to speak of apparent contradictions in the text of Scripture, noting the difference between the triune formula that Jesus gave the apostles and the fact that they baptized in the name of Jesus only (presumably referring to the Acts of the Apostles). However, Hilary does not explain how the two are to be harmonized:

⁴³<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3101.htm>

⁴⁴<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF2-09/Npnf2-09-08.htm>

⁴⁵<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF2-09/Npnf2-09-06.htm>

We must dispense, too, with the books of Moses, lest the darkness be thought coeval with God who dwells in the unborn light, since in Genesis the day began to be after the night; lest the years of Methuselah extend later than the date of the deluge, and consequently more than eight souls were saved lest God hearing the cry of Sodom when the measure of its sins was full should come down as though ignorant of the cry to see if the measure of its sins was full according to the cry, and be found to be ignorant of what He knew; lest any one of those who buried Moses should have known his sepulchre when he was buried; lest these passages, as the heretics think, should prove that the contradictions of the law make it its own enemy. So as they do not understand them, we ought not to read them. And though I should not have said it myself unless forced by the argument, we must, if it seems fit, abolish all the divine and holy Gospels with their message of our salvation, lest their statements be found inconsistent; lest we should read that the Lord who was to send the Holy Spirit was Himself born of the Holy Spirit; lest He who was to threaten death by the sword to those who should take the sword, should before His passion command that a sword should be brought; lest He who was about to descend into hell should say that He would be in paradise with the thief; **lest finally the Apostles should be found at fault, in that when commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, they baptized in the name of Jesus only.** I speak to you, brethren, to you, who are no longer nourished with milk, but with meat, and are strong. Shall we, because the wise men of the world have not understood these things, and they are foolish unto them, be wise as the world is wise and believe these things foolish? Because they are hidden from the godless, shall we refuse to shine with the truth of a doctrine which we understand? We prejudice the cause of divine doctrines when we think that they ought not to exist, because some do not regard them as holy. If so, we must not glory in the cross of Christ, because it is a stumbling-block to the world; and we must not preach death in connection with the living God, lest the godless argue that God is dead. – Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Councils, or The Faith of the Easterns*, 85

Athanasius

Athanasius was bishop of Alexandria, Egypt. He wrote a letter to Serapion of Thmuis around A.D. 360, in which he refers to multiple baptismal formulas, including INJC and INFSHS. He was clear, however, that only the triune formula was valid. Anyone baptized in a single name does not receive the remission of sins:

For as the faith in the Triad, which has been delivered to us, joins us to God; and as **he who takes anything away from the Triad, and is baptized in the name of the Father alone, or in the name of the Son alone, or in the Father and the Son without the Holy Spirit, receives nothing, but remains ineffective and uninitiated**, both himself and he who is supposed to initiate him (for the rite of initiation is in the Triad); so he who divides the Son from the Father, or who reduces the Spirit to the level of the creatures, has neither the Son nor the Father, but is without God, worse than an unbeliever, and anything rather than a Christian. And justly so. **For as baptism, which is given in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is one; and as there is one faith in the Triad (as the Apostle said); so the holy Triad, being identical with itself and united within itself, has in it nothing which belongs to things originate.** This is the indivisible unity of the Triad; and faith therein is one. But if, from the new discovery you Tropici have made, it is not so; if you have dreamed dreams of calling the Holy Spirit a creature—then you no longer have one faith and one baptism, but two, one in the Father and the Son, another in an angel who is a creature. There is no security or truth left you. – Athanasius, First Letter to Serapion of Thmuis, 30⁴⁶

Apostolic Constitutions

The Apostolic Constitutions were written in Syria around A.D. 375-380. A passage in book three makes it clear that the triune formula was verbally invoked over the baptizand: “Then thou, O bishop, or a priest acting under thy direction, shalt **baptize** them in the water, **pronouncing over them the holy invocation of the Father and Son and Holy Ghost.**”⁴⁷

Book six refers to baptism in “the death of the Lord,” but goes on to describe the application of that baptism being “**conferred...in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.**” He even reasons that since “there is one God [the Father], one Christ, and one Comforter [corresponding to the Matthew 28:19 formula], and one death of the Lord in the body,” then baptism should be done “unto

⁴⁶<https://catholiclibrary.org/library/view?docId=Synchronized-EN/npnf.Athanasius.EpistletoSerapion.en.html;chunk.id=00000063>

⁴⁷Apostolic Constitutions, book 3, 16.4. See <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07153.htm>.

Him” [presumably Jesus]. While he does not use the exact phrase “in the name of Jesus Christ,” the focus on baptism being “into the death of the Lord” and speaking of baptism being done to “Him” (Jesus) is reminiscent of baptism INJC:

Be likewise contented with **one baptism alone, that which is into the death of the Lord**; not that which is conferred by wicked heretics, but that which is **conferred by unblameable priests, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**: and let not that which comes from the ungodly be received by you, nor let that which is done by the godly be disannulled by a second. **For as there is one God, one Christ, and one Comforter, and one death of the Lord in the body, so let that baptism which is unto Him be but one.** But those that receive polluted baptism from the ungodly will become partners in their opinions. For they are not priests. For God says to them: Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you from the office of a priest to me. Nor indeed are those that are baptized by them initiated, but are polluted, not receiving the remission of sins, but the bond of impiety. And, besides, they that attempt to baptize those already initiated crucify the Lord afresh, slay Him a second time, laugh at divine and ridicule holy things, affront the Spirit, dishonour the sacred blood of Christ as common blood, are impious against Him that sent, Him that suffered, and Him that witnessed. Nay, he that, out of contempt, will not be baptized, shall be condemned as an unbeliever, and shall be reproached as ungrateful and foolish. – Apostolic Constitutions, book 6, ch 15⁴⁸

In book seven, the author addressed the proper procedure for baptizing converts. That he used the triune formula for baptizing is clear from two things. First, he appeals to direction that was already provided earlier in the document. Surely he is speaking of his direction in book three to “pronounc[e] over them the holy invocation of the Father and Son and Holy Ghost.”

Second, he quotes Matthew 28:19 in the context of discussing how to baptize. He is not referring to the kind of baptism or the authority for baptism, but the way in which it should be administered. This is in the same context where he describes other practical aspects of the baptism including the anointing with oil, the water, and fasting:

Now concerning baptism, O bishop, or presbyter, **we have already given direction**, and we now say, that **you shall so baptize as the Lord commanded us, saying: Go, 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): **of the Father who sent, of Christ who came, of the Comforter who testified.** But you shall beforehand anoint the person with the holy oil, and afterward baptize him with the water, and in the conclusion shall seal him with the ointment; that the anointing with oil may be the participation of the Holy Spirit, and the water the symbol of the death of Christ, and the ointment the seal of the covenants. But if there be neither oil nor ointment, water is sufficient both for the anointing, and for the seal, and for the confession of Him that is dead, or indeed is dying together with Christ. But before baptism, let him that is to be baptized fast; for even the Lord, when He was first baptized by John, and abode in the wilderness, did afterward fast forty days and forty nights. – Apostolic Constitutions, book 7, ch 22⁴⁹

As he describes what should happen when the baptizand arrives at the water, he provides a prayer for the priest followed by the instruction to anoint the baptizand in oil after he has been baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:”

After this he comes to the water, and blesses and glorifies the Lord God Almighty, the Father of the only begotten God; and the priest returns thanks that He has sent His Son to become man on our account, that He might save us; that He has permitted that He should in all things become obedient to the laws of that incarnation, to preach the kingdom of heaven, the remission of sins, and the resurrection of the dead. Moreover, he adores the only begotten God Himself, after His Father, and for Him, giving Him thanks that He undertook to die for all men by the cross, the type of which He has appointed to be the baptism of regeneration. He glorifies Him also, for that God who is the Lord of the whole world, in the name of Christ and by His Holy Spirit, has not cast off mankind but has suited His providence to the difference of seasons: at first giving to Adam himself paradise for an habitation of pleasure, and afterwards giving a command on account of providence, and casting out the offender justly, but through His goodness not utterly casting him off, but instructing his posterity in succeeding ages after various manners; on whose account, in the conclusion of the world, He has sent His Son to become man for man's sake, and to undergo all human passions

⁴⁸<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07156.htm>

⁴⁹<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07157.htm>

without sin. Him, therefore, let the priest even now call upon in baptism, and let him say: Look down from heaven, and sanctify this water, and give it grace and power, that so he that is to be baptized, according to the command of Your Christ, may be crucified with Him, and may die with Him, and may be buried with Him, and may rise with Him to the adoption which is in Him, that he may be dead to sin and live to righteousness. And after this, **when he has baptized him in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**, he shall anoint him with ointment, and shall add as follows.

Finally, in book eight, we read of Christians “upon whom the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is called”:

Now the Scripture says, The men in power are passionate. But let them not drink wine, lest by drinking they forget wisdom, and are not able to judge aright. Wherefore both the presbyters and the deacons are those of authority in the Church next to God Almighty and His beloved Son. We say this, not they are not to drink at all, otherwise it would be to the reproach of what God has made for cheerfulness, but that they be not disordered with wine. For the Scripture does not say, Do not drink wine; but what says it? Drink not wine to drunkenness; and again, Thorns spring up in the hand of the drunkard. Nor do we say this only to those of the clergy, but also to every lay Christian, **upon whom the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is called**.

...

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These are interesting passages because it does speak of the name of Jesus being called upon Christians (an oral invocation), and thus we would naturally think the reference is to the baptismal formula. Two things should be noted, however. First, in both cases it is specified that this is something “lay Christians” experience; i.e. non-clergy. Surely the meaning is not that non-clergy are baptized in Jesus’ name but clergy are not. A member of the clergy would be baptized long before he became a member of the clergy, and thus his baptism would be the same as everyone else’s.

Second, there is no mention of baptism in the context of the name of the Lord Jesus being called on these lay Christians. It’s possible that the text is referring to baptism, but unlikely given the fact that it is twice specified that the lay Christians are having the name of Jesus called on them. Probably, the event in mind is the Lord’s Supper. The priest would invoke the name of the Jesus over the laity during the Eucharist celebration. This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that the first quote (in section 15) appears in a section regarding the Eucharist liturgy. It is further bolstered by canon 50 in chapter 8 which condemns baptism INJC:

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 and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, O bishops, **baptize thrice into one Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost**, according to the will of Christ, and our constitution by the Spirit. – Apostolic Constitutions, book 8, ch 47, canon 50

The contrast of three immersions into the Father, Son, and Spirit with the one immersion into Christ in the context of the baptismal ceremony makes it clear that the author is speaking of baptismal formulas. If we understand the references to “upon whom the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is called” as references to the baptismal formula, then we would have to conclude that the work affirms baptism INJC just before condemning it. The contradiction would be so blatant as to be laughable. This is further

⁵⁰<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07158.htm>

evidence, then, that the event for which the name of Jesus is called on lay Christians is not their baptism.

Ambrose of Milan

In his A.D. 381 treatise, *On the Holy Spirit*, Ambrose addressed the efficacy of those who were only baptized INJC (as well as those who might only be baptized in the name of the Father or the name of the Holy Spirit). He argued that so long as the baptizand believes in the Trinity, their baptism is still efficacious. If, however, they do not believe in the Trinity, it is not. It's clear that he has a baptismal formula in mind because he spoke of "mention[ing]" the Son in baptism, and contrasts this with what the person "belie[ves]" in their heart. In another place he contrasts what is "named" in baptism versus what is "apprehended" in the heart:

The statement of the Apostle, that all things are of the Father by the Son, does not separate the Spirit from Their company, since **what is referred to one Person is also attributed to each. So those baptized in the Name of Christ are held to be baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, if, that is, there is belief in the Three Persons, otherwise the baptism will be null.** This also applies to baptism in the Name of the Holy Spirit. If because of one passage the Holy Spirit is separated from the Father and the Son, it will necessarily follow from other passages that the Father will be subordinated to the Son. The Son is worshipped by angels, not by the Spirit, for the latter is His witness, not His servant. Where the Son is spoken of as being before all, it is to be understood of creatures. The great dignity of the Holy Spirit is proved by the absence of forgiveness for the sin against Him. How it is that such sin cannot be forgiven, and how the Spirit is one. 32. But perhaps someone may say that there was a reason why the writer said that all things were of the Father, and all things through the Son, but made no mention of the Holy Spirit, and would obtain the foundation of an argument from this. But if he persists in his perverse interpretation, in how many passages will he find the power of the Holy Spirit asserted, in which Scripture has stated nothing concerning either the Father or the Son, but has left it to be understood? 40. Where, then, the grace of the Spirit is asserted, is that of God the Father or of the Only-begotten Son denied? By no means; for as the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father, so, too, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Who hath been given us." **And as he who is blessed in Christ is blessed in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, because the Name is one and the Power one; so, too, when any divine operation, whether of the Father, or of the Son, or of the Holy Spirit, is treated of, it is not referred only to the Holy Spirit, but also to the Father and the Son, and not only to the Father, but also to the Son and the Spirit.** 41. Then, too, the Ethiopian eunuch of Queen Candace, when **baptized in Christ**, obtained the fulness of the sacrament. And they who said that they knew not of any Holy Spirit, although they said that they had been baptized with John's baptism, were baptized afterwards, because John baptized for the remission of sins in the Name of the coming Jesus, not in his own. And so they knew not the Spirit, because in the form in which John baptized **they had not received baptism in the Name of Christ.** For John, though he did not baptize in the Spirit, nevertheless preached Christ and the Spirit. And then, when he was questioned whether he were perchance himself the Christ, he answered: "I baptize you with water, but a stronger than I shall come, Whose shoes I am not worthy to bear, He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." They therefore, because they had been **baptized neither in the Name of Christ** nor with faith in the Holy Spirit, could not receive the sacrament of baptism. 42. So they were **baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ**, and baptism was not repeated in their case, but administered differently, for there is but one baptism. But where there is not the complete sacrament of baptism, there is not considered to be a commencement nor any kind of baptism. **But baptism is complete if one confess the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If you deny One you overthrow the whole. And just as if you mention in words One only, either the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, and in your belief do not deny either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, the mystery of the faith is complete, so, too, although you name the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and lessen the power of either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, the whole mystery is made empty.** And, lastly, they who had said: "We have not heard if there be any Holy Spirit, were **baptized afterwards in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.**" And this was an additional abundance of grace, for now through Paul's preaching they knew the Holy Spirit. 43. Nor ought it to seem opposed to this, that although subsequently mention is not made of the Spirit, He is yet believed in, and **what had not been mentioned in words is expressed in belief. For when it is said, "In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ," the mystery is complete through the oneness of the Name, and the Spirit is not separated from the baptism of Christ, since John baptized unto repentance, Christ in the Spirit.** 44. Let us now consider whether as we read that the sacrament of **baptism in the Name of Christ** was complete, so, too, when the Holy Spirit alone is named, anything is wanting to the completeness of the mystery. Let us follow out the argument that **he who has named One has signified the Trinity. If you name Christ, you imply both God the Father by Whom the Son was anointed, and the Son Himself Who was anointed, and the Holy Spirit with Whom He was anointed.** For it is

written: "This Jesus of Nazareth, Whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit." **And if you name the Father, you denote equally His Son and the Spirit of His mouth, if, that is, you apprehend it in your heart.** And if you speak of the Spirit, you name also God the Father, from Whom the Spirit proceeds, and the Son, inasmuch as He is also the Spirit of the Son. – Ambrose, On the Holy Spirit, book 1, ch 3.32,40-44⁵¹

Then, Ambrose turned his attention to Matthew 28:19. He observed that Jesus used the singular "name," but unlike most advocates of the Jesus' name formula, he doesn't think this means we should only baptize in a single name. Instead, he argues that Jesus used the singular name because God is one, and God's name is one. In other words, the singular "name" is used to emphasize the oneness of God's nature:

If, then, God is One, one is the name, one is the power, of the Trinity. Christ Himself, indeed, saith: "Go ye, baptize the nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In the *name*, mark you, not in the *names*. ... We say, then, that there is one God, not two or three Gods, this being the error into which the impious heresy of the Arians doth run with its blasphemies. For it says that there are three Gods, in that it divides the Godhead of the Trinity; **whereas the Lord, in saying, "Go, baptize the nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," hath shown that the Trinity is of one power.** We confess Father, Son, and Spirit, understanding in a perfect Trinity both fulness of Divinity and unity of power. [Ambrose, On the Holy Spirit, book 1.1.8,10]

....

Who, then, would dare to deny the oneness of Name, when he sees the oneness of the working. But why should I maintain the unity of the Name by arguments, when there is the plain testimony of the Divine Voice that **the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one?** For it is written: "Go, baptize all nations in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." **He said, "in the Name," not "in the Names."** **So, then, the Name of the Father is not one, that of the Son another, and that of the Holy Spirit another, for God is one; the Names are not more than one, for there are not two Gods, or three Gods.** And that He might reveal that the Godhead is one and the Majesty one, because the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, and the Son did not come in one Name and the Holy Spirit in another, the Lord Himself said: "I am come in My Father's Name, and ye did not receive Me, if another shall come in his own name ye will receive him." 133. And Scripture makes clear that that which is the Father's Name, the same is also that of the Son, for the Lord said in Exodus: "I will go before thee in My Name, and will call by My Name the Lord before thee." So, then, the Lord said that He would call the Lord by His Name. The Lord, then, is the Name of the Father and of the Son. 134. But since the Name of the Father and of the Son is one, learn that the same is the Name of the Holy Spirit also, since the Holy Spirit came in the Name of the Son, as it is written: "But the Paraclete, even the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall teach you all things." But He Who came in the Name of the Son came also certainly in the Name of the Father, for the Name of the Father and of the Son is one. Thus it comes to pass that the Name of the Father and of the Son is also that of the Holy Spirit. For there is no other Name given under heaven wherein we must be saved. [Ambrose, On the Holy Spirit, book 1, ch 3, 132-34]

...

155. At the same time He showed that the oneness of the Divine Name must be taught, not the difference, since Christ came in the oneness of the Name, but Antichrist will come in his own name, as it is written: "I am come in My Father's Name, and ye did not receive Me, if another shall come in his own name, ye will receive him." 156. We are, then, **clearly taught by these passages that there is no difference of Name in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and that that which is the Name of the Father is also the Name of the Son, and likewise that which is the Name of the Son is also that of the Holy Spirit, when the Son also is called Paraclete, as is the Holy Spirit.** And therefore does the Lord Jesus say in the Gospel: "I will ask My Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth." And He said well "another," that you might not suppose that the Son is also the Spirit, for oneness is of the Name, not a Sabellian confusion of the Son and of the Spirit. – Ambrose, On the Holy Spirit, book 1, Ch 3, 155-6⁵²

It is clear, then, that in Ambrose's day, there were Italians who were using the Jesus' name baptismal formula rather than the triune formula, and Ambrose considered the INJC formula to be valid so long as the person baptized INJC believed in the Trinity. But it also seems clear that Ambrose prefers the triune formula to the Jesus' name formula since the triune formula more clearly matches what the baptizand is

⁵¹<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF2-10/Npnf2-10-13.htm>

⁵²<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF2-10/Npnf2-10-13.htm>

confessing in their heart. Indeed, in book two he speaks of the threefold question being put to the baptizand, and the baptizand answering three times. He is probably referring to the practice of asking the baptizand whether he believes in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit prior to each of the three immersions in baptism:

Notice, also, **that the appearance of the mystery three times repeated expressed the operation of the Trinity. And so in the mysteries the threefold question is put, and the threefold answer made, and no one can be cleansed but by a threefold confession.** For which reason, also, Peter in the Gospel is asked three times whether he loves the Lord, that by the threefold answer the bonds of the guilt he had contracted by denying the Lord might be loosed. – Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit*, book 2, 105

Around A.D. 387-390, Ambrose wrote *On the Mysteries* for baptismal catechumens. He says that only those baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can receive salvation. It's not clear whether he is referring to a baptismal formula spoken by the baptizer, but he is clear that the baptizand confesses the Father, Son, and Spirit in baptism. As with Cyril of Jerusalem, it's possible that Ambrose is referring to a practice in which the baptizer uses the formula in the form of a question, asking the baptizand if he believes in the Father, Son, and Spirit prior to being dipped, with the baptizand answering in the affirmative each time:

Therefore read that the three witnesses in baptism, the water, the blood, and the Spirit, are one, for if you take away one of these, the Sacrament of Baptism does not exist. For what is water without the cross of Christ? A common element, without any sacramental effect. Nor, again, is there the Sacrament of Regeneration without water: For except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Now, even the catechumen believes in the cross of the Lord Jesus, wherewith he too is signed; **but unless he be baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, he cannot receive remission of sins nor gain the gift of spiritual grace.** 21. So that Syrian dipped himself seven times under the law, but **you were baptized in the Name of the Trinity, you confessed the Father. Call to mind what you did: you confessed the Son, you confessed the Holy Spirit.** Mark well the order of things in this faith: you died to the world, and rose again to God. And as though buried to the world in that element, being dead to sin, you rose again to eternal life. Believe, therefore, that these waters are not void of power. – Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, chapter 4.20)⁵³

Gregory of Nazianzus

Gregory of Nazianzus, bishop of Constantinople (modern Istanbul in Turkey), wrote his *Oration on Holy Baptism* in A.D. 381. He mentioned the triune name of Matthew 28:19 in connection with baptism, but there's no clear indication that he saw it as a baptismal formula verbally invoked over the baptizand. He does, however, seem to make reference to the singular nature of "name" in Matthew 28:19, explaining that there is one common name to the three persons of the Trinity, namely "the Godhead:"

But not yet perhaps is there formed upon your soul any writing good or bad; and you want to be written upon today, and formed by us unto perfection. Let us go within the cloud. Give me the tables of your heart; I will be your Moses, though this be a bold thing to say; I will write on them with the finger of God a new Decalogue. I will write on them a shorter method of salvation. And if there be any heretical or unreasoning beast, let him remain below, or he will run the risk of being stoned by the Word of truth. I will **baptize you and make you a disciple in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; and These Three have One common name, the Godhead.** And you shall know, both by appearances and by words that you reject all ungodliness, and are united to all the Godhead. – Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration on Holy Baptism*, Oration 40.45⁵⁴

Jerome

In A.D. 382, Jerome spoke of those who were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, but gave no clear indication that this is a baptismal formula: "[S]eeing that a man, **baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost**, becomes a temple of the Lord, and that while the old abode

⁵³<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3405.htm>

⁵⁴<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF2-07/Npnf2-07-52.htm>

is destroyed a new shrine is built for the Trinity, how can you say that sins can be remitted among the Arians without the coming of the Holy Ghost? How is a soul purged from its former stains which has not the Holy Ghost?"⁵⁵

Gregory of Nyssa

In A.D. 375 or 380, Gregory of Nyssa wrote a letter to the city of Sebasteia. He quoted Matthew 28:19 and then said it is through the Trinity that baptism is effective. It's clear that he is not referring to the mere agency of the Trinity, for he goes on to say that if any one of the names of the Trinity is omitted during baptism, the baptism is not effective for salvation. To speak of omitting names indicates that Gregory had a baptismal formula in mind:

Now the doctrine of the Lord is this: "Go," **He said, "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."** Since, then, in the case of those who are regenerate from death to eternal life, **it is through the Holy Trinity that the life-giving power is bestowed on those who with faith are deemed worthy of the grace,** and in like manner **the grace is imperfect, if any one, whichever it be, of the names of the Holy Trinity be omitted in the saving baptism**—for the sacrament of regeneration is not completed in the Son and the Father alone without the Spirit: nor is the perfect boon of life imparted to Baptism in the Father and the Spirit, if the name of the Son be suppressed: nor is the grace of that Resurrection accomplished in the Father and the Son, if the Spirit be left out. — Gregory of Nyssa, *To the City of Sebasteia*, Epistle 2⁵⁶

Gregory delivered a sermon for the feast of Epiphany (celebrating the baptism of Jesus) around A.D. 385 or 386. There, he made it crystal clear that the triune formula was spoken over the baptizand, demonstrating that the triune formula was being used in Nyssa (modern Turkey) in the fourth century:

And we in receiving Baptism, in imitation of our Lord and Teacher and Guide, are not indeed buried in the earth (for this is the shelter of the body that is entirely dead, covering the infirmity and decay of our nature), but coming to the element akin to earth, to water, we conceal ourselves in that as the Saviour did in the earth: and by doing this thrice we represent for ourselves that grace of the Resurrection which was wrought in three days: and this we do, **not receiving the sacrament in silence, but while there are spoken over us the names of the three sacred persons on Whom we believed**, in Whom we also hope, from Whom comes to us both the fact of our present and the fact of our future existence. It may be thou art offended, thou who contendest boldly against the glory of the Spirit, and that thou grudgest to the Spirit that veneration wherewith He is revered by the godly. Leave off contending with me: resist, if thou canst, **those words of the Lord which gave to men the rule of the Baptismal invocation. What says the Lord's command? "Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost"** — Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ (A Sermon For the Day of Lights)*⁵⁷

John Chrysostom

In his *Homilies on John* (A.D. 390 or 391), John Chrysostom indicated that the triune phrase was used as a baptismal formula when he said the Son and Holy Spirit are included in the rite of baptism because people only doubt the Son and Spirit, not the Father. It only makes sense to speak of including the Son and Spirit in baptism if the inclusion involves some kind of verbal invocation. After all, if God were a Trinity, the Son and Holy Spirit would be included in baptism whether we know it or not. This provides evidence of the use of the triune formula in Antioch and Constantinople (both are located in modern Turkey) in the fourth century:

Therefore, **in the case of baptism also the Trinity is included. The Father is able to effect the whole, as is the Son, and the Holy Ghost; yet, since concerning the Father no man doubts, but the doubt was concerning the Son, and**

⁵⁵Jerome, *Dialogue Against the Luciferians*, 6. See <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3005.htm>.

⁵⁶<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf205.xiii.iii.html>

⁵⁷<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2910.htm>

the Holy Ghost, They are included in the rite, that by Their community in supplying those unspeakable blessings, we may also fully learn Their community in dignity. – John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, 78:3⁵⁸

Summary

We have 11 witnesses and 15 documents that speak to the baptismal formula in the fourth century, which is roughly the same amount of data we have from the third century. Once again, we don't find any indication that some Christians practiced silent baptism.

Two authors spoke of baptism INJC as well as INFSHS interchangeably, and yet both clearly used INFSHS as their baptismal formula (Pseudo-Clement, Apostolic Constitutions). Ambrose and Athanasius indicate that some were baptizing INJC in their day, as does the Apostolic Constitutions since it condemns those who baptize INJC. Significantly, Ambrose does not say it was only heretical groups who were doing so. It is possible, then, that some institutional churches were baptizing INJC in Italy in the fourth century, and Ambrose found this acceptable so long as the baptizands believed in the Trinity when baptized.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the triune formula was being used by virtually all of the institutional churches. Nine authors (11 documents) explicitly state or imply that the triune formula was used in France, Egypt, Northern Africa more generally, Italy, Turkey, and Israel (Council of Arles, Pseudo-Clement, Cyril of Jerusalem, Hilary, Athanasius, Apostolic Constitutions, Ambrose, Gregory Nyssa, John Chrysostom). Two authors cite the words of Matthew 28:19 in the context of baptism, but do not clearly identify it as a baptismal formula (Gregory Nazianzus, Jerome).

Finally, three authors addressed the apparent conflict between baptism INJC and INFSHS (Hilary, Ambrose, Gregory Nazianzus), and one of those authors thought both were acceptable baptismal formulas given certain qualifications (Ambrose).

5th Century

Augustine

Augustine, writing in the first half of the 5th century, spoke of both baptism INJC as well as baptism INFSHS without any hint of them being in contradiction with one another – even referring to the orthodox as being baptized INJC. It's not clear, however, that he is using either as a baptismal formula:

We are neither made fouler by our washing, nor cleaner by yours. But when the **water of baptism is given to any one in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**, it is neither ours nor yours, but His of whom it was said to John, "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."

...

Augustine answered: I also might say, You when you are infected put on Optatus the betrayer, the robber, the oppressor, the separator of husband and wife; but far be it from me that the desire of returning an evil word should provoke me into any falsehood: for neither do you put on Optatus, nor we Judas. Therefore, if each one who comes to us shall answer to our questions that he has been baptized in the name of Optatus, he shall be **baptized in the name of Christ**; and if you baptized any that came from us and said that they had been baptized in the name of the traitor Judas, in that case we have no fault to find with what you have done. But if they had been **baptized in the name of Christ**, do you not see what an error you commit in thinking that the sacraments of God can undergo change through any changeableness of human sins, or be polluted by defilement in the life of any man? – Augustine, In Answer to the Letters of Petilian, the Donatist, Bishop of Cirta, book 2, ch 2.5, 44.104.⁵⁹

⁵⁸<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/240178.htm>

⁵⁹<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF1-04/npnf1-04-61.htm>

In his work, *On Baptism*, Augustine spoke of heretics who baptize INJC, but since he contrasted this with the orthodox who “speak in the name of Christ” he may not have had a specific baptismal formula in mind:

For in fact, as to what some opposed to the reasoning of Cyprian, that the apostle says, "Notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, let Christ be preached;" Cyprian rightly exposed their error, showing that it has nothing to do with the case of heretics, since the apostle was speaking of those who were acting within the Church, with malicious envy seeking their own profit. They announced Christ, indeed, according to the truth whereby we believe in Christ, but not in the spirit in which He was announced by the good evangelists to the sons of the dove. "For Paul," he says, "in his epistle was not speaking of heretics, or of their baptism, so that it could be shown that he had laid down anything concerning this matter. He was speaking of brethren, whether as walking disorderly and contrary to the discipline of the Church, or as keeping the discipline of the Church in the fear of God. And he declared that some of them spoke the word of God steadfastly and fearlessly, but that some were acting in envy and strife; that some had kept themselves encompassed with kindly Christian love, but that others entertained malice and strife: but yet that he patiently endured all things, with the view that, whether in truth or in pretence, the name of Christ, which Paul preached, might come to the knowledge of the greatest number, and that the sowing of the word, which was as yet a new and unaccustomed work, might spread more widely by the preaching of those that spoke. Furthermore, it is one thing for those who are within the Church to **speak in the name of Christ**, another thing for those who are without, acting against the Church, to **baptize in the name of Christ**." These words of Cyprian seem to warn us that we must distinguish between those who are bad outside, and those who are bad within the Church. And those whom he says that the apostle represents as preaching the gospel impurely and of envy, he says truly were within. – Augustine, *On Baptism*, book 4, ch 7⁶⁰

While Augustine spoke of both baptism INJC and INFSHS, it's clear that he thought of the triune phrase as the actual baptismal formula. In book 6 of *On Baptism*, Augustine admonished the church to reject the heretics' baptism, which he characterized as “not consecrated in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Augustine's use of “consecration” makes it clear that he has in mind an actual utterance of the triune formula. After all, the only way the institutional church could discern if “this name [was] in it” is if the triune formula was uttered verbally in baptism by both heretics and orthodox alike. This implies that the heretics used a different formula than the one Augustine thought to be the correct one (INFSHS):

Lucratius of Theni said: "Our God and Lord Jesus Christ, teaching the apostles with His own mouth, fully laid down our faith, and the grace of baptism, and the rule of the law of the Church, saying, 'Go ye, and teach all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**.' Therefore the false and unrighteous baptism of heretics is to be repudiated by us, and contradicted with all solemnity of witness, seeing that from their mouth issues not life, but poison, not heavenly grace, but blaspheming of the Trinity. And so it is plain that heretics coming to the Church ought to be baptized with perfect and Catholic baptism, that, being purified from the blasphemy of their presumption, they may be reformed by the grace of the Holy Spirit." 70. Clearly, **if the baptism is not consecrated in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, it should be considered to be of the heretics, and repudiated as unrighteous by us with all solemnity of witness**; but if we discern this name in it, we do better to distinguish the words of the gospel from heretical error, and approve what is sound in them, correcting what is faulty. – Augustine, *On Baptism*, book 6, ch 36, 69-70⁶¹

Augustine spoke of baptism being “consecrated in the words of the gospel,” referring back to Mommulus' quotation of Matthew 28:19. It was the words themselves that consecrated the baptizand:

Monnulus of Girba said: “The truth of our mother, the Catholic Church, has continued, and still continues among us, brethren, especially in **the threefold nature of baptism**, as our Lord says, 'Go, **baptize all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**.' Since, therefore," he goes on to say, "we know clearly that heretics have neither Father, Son, nor Holy Ghost, they ought, on coming to our mother, the Church, to be truly regenerated and baptized, that the cancer which they had, and the wrath of condemnation, and the destructive energy of error may be sanctified by the holy and heavenly laver." 29. To this we answer, That **all who are baptized with the baptism that is consecrated in the words of the gospel have the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost in the sacrament**

⁶⁰<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF1-04/npnf1-04-55.htm>

⁶¹https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF1-04/npnf1-04-57.htm#P3839_2108641

alone; but that in heart and in life neither do those have them who live an abandoned and accursed life within. – Augustine, *On Baptism*, book 6, ch 17.28-9⁶²

That Augustine viewed the triune phrase as the proper baptismal formula is clear from a number of other references as well:

I desire you therefore, in the first place, to hold fast this as the fundamental principle in the present discussion, that our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed to us a "light yoke" and an "easy burden," as He declares in the Gospel: in accordance with which He has bound His people under the new dispensation together in fellowship by sacraments, which are in number very few, in observance most easy, and in significance most excellent, as **baptism solemnized in the name of the Trinity**, the communion of His body and blood, and such other things as are prescribed in the canonical Scriptures, with the exception of those enactments which were a yoke of bondage to God's ancient people, suited to their state of heart and to the times of the prophets, and which are found in the five books of Moses. – Augustine, *Letter 54*, chapter 1.1⁶³

In his work, *In Answer to the Letters of Petilian, the Donatist, Bishop of Cirta*, he said Christ is the authority for baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit: **"Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost has Christ for its authority, not any man, whoever he may be; and Christ is the truth, not any man."**⁶⁴ Augustine must have understood Matthew 28:19 as a baptismal formula rather than a generic reference to the authority of the Trinity because it would not make sense to say Jesus is the authority for baptizing in the authority of the Trinity.

And again:

Next, listen for a short time to the kind of way in which he has tried to use, in his own behalf, the passages which I had advanced from the writings of the Apostle Paul. "For you asserted," he says, "that the Apostle Paul finds fault with those who used to say that they were of the Apostle Paul, saying, 'Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?' Wherefore, if they were in error, and would have perished had they not been corrected, because they wished to be of Paul, what hope can there possibly be for those who have wished to be of Donatus? For this is their sole object, that the origin, and root, and head of him that is baptized should be none other than he by whom he is baptized." These words, and this confirmation from the writings of the apostle, he has quoted from my epistle, and he has proposed to himself the task of refuting them. Go on then, I beg of you, to see how he has fulfilled the task. For he says, "This assertion is meaningless, and inflated, and childish, and foolish, and something very far from a true exposition of our faith. For you would only be right in asserting this, if we were to say, We have been baptized in the name of Donatus, or Donatus was crucified for us, or we have been baptized in our own name. But since such things as this neither have been said nor are said by us, **seeing that we follow the formula of the holy Trinity**, it is dear that you are mad to bring such accusations against us. **Or if you think that we have been baptized in the name of Donatus, or in our own name, you are miserably deceived**, and at the same time confess in your sacrilege that you on your part defile your wretched selves in the name of Caecilianus." – Augustine, *In Answer to the Letters of Petilian, the Donatist, Bishop of Cirta*, book 3, ch 51.63⁶⁵

We have solid evidence, then, that the institutional church baptized people using the triune formula in the fifth century in North Africa.

Despite believing INFSHS to be the proper baptismal formula, Augustine doesn't hesitate to describe baptism as being INJC. He never explicitly described INJC as a baptismal formula, however, so perhaps he was using INJC as a shorthand way of referring to the triune formula, or to emphasize the fact that baptism joins us to Jesus:

This is the answer which Petilianus has made to those arguments of mine, not supposing-or rather making a noise that no one might suppose-that he has made no answer at all which could bear in any way upon the question which is

⁶²<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/14086.htm>

⁶³<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF1-01/npnf1-01-23.htm>

⁶⁴Augustine, *In Answer to the Letters of Petilian*, book 2, ch 24.57. See <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/14092.htm>.

⁶⁵<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF1-04/npnf1-04-62.htm>

under discussion. For who could fail to see that this witness of the apostle has been adduced by us with all the more propriety, in that you do not say that you were baptized in the name of Donatus, or that Donatus was crucified for you, and yet separate yourselves from the communion of the Catholic Church out of respect to the party of Donatus; as also those whom Paul was rebuking certainly did not say that they had been baptized in the name of Paul, or that Paul has been crucified for them, and yet they were making a schism in the name of Paul. **As therefore in their case, for whom Christ, not Paul, was crucified, and who were baptized in the name of Christ,** not of Paul, and who yet said, "I am of Paul," the rebuke is used with all the more propriety, "Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" **to make them cling to Him who was crucified for them, and in whose name they were baptized,** and not be guilty of division in the name of Paul; so in your case, also, the rebuke, Was Donatus crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Donatus? is used all the more appositely, because you do not say, We were baptized in the name of Donatus, and yet desire to be of the party of Donatus. **For you know that it was Christ who was crucified for you, and Christ in whose name you were baptized;** and yet, out of respect to the name and party of Donatus, you show such obstinacy in fighting against the unity of **Christ**, who was crucified for you, **and in whose name you were baptized.** ... Certainly it is now plain, certainly he needs no longer any interpreter, or disputant, or demonstrator, to show that the object of his party is to prove that the origin, and root, and head of him that is baptized is none other than he by whom he is baptized. And yet, being overwhelmed by the force of truth, and as though forgetful of what he had said before, Petilianus acknowledges afterwards to me that Christ is the origin and root of them that are regenerate, and the Head of the Church, and not any one that may happen to be the dispenser and minister of baptism. **For having said that the apostles used to baptize in the name of Christ,** and set forth Christ as the foundation of their faith, to make men Christians, and being fain to prove this, too, by passages and examples from holy Scripture, just as though we were denying it, he says, "Where is now that voice, from which issued the noise of those minute and constant petty questionings, wherein, in the spirit of envy and self-conceit, you uttered many involved sayings about Christ, and for Christ, and in Christ, in opposition to the rashness and haughtiness of men? Lo, Christ is the origin, Christ, in the head, Christ is the root of the Christian."—Augustine, In Answer to the Letters of Petilian, the Donatist, Bishop of Cirta, book 3, ch 52.64

In Augustine's *Tractate on the Gospel of John*, he twice mentions Jesus' commission to the disciples in Matthew 28:19 to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He points out that Jesus said "name" rather than "names," and thinks this is meant to emphasize that the three persons are one God:

Therefore, beloved, let us see what those men desire not to see; not what they may not see, but what they grieve to see, as though it were shut against them. Whither were the disciples **sent to baptize as ministers, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost?** Whither were they sent? "Go," said He, "baptize the nations." You have heard, brethren, how that inheritance comes, "Ask of me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the utmost bounds of the earth for Thy possessions." You have heard how that "from Sion went forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." **For it was there the disciples were told, "Go, baptize the nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."** We became attentive when we heard, "Go, baptize the nations." In whose name? "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." This is one God; for it says not in the "names" of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, but "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Where thou hearest one name, there is one God; just as it was said of Abraham's seed, and the Apostle Paul expounds it, "In thy seed shall all nations be blessed; he said not, In seeds, as in many, but as in one, and in thy seed which is Christ." Wherefore, just as the apostle wished to show thee that, because in that place it is not said "in seeds," Christ is one; so here too, **when it is said, "in the name," not in the names, even as these, "in seed," not in seeds, is it proved that the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost are one God.** 10. But lo, say the disciples to the Lord, we are told in what name we are to baptize; Thou hast made us ministers, and hast said to us, "Go, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Whither shall we go? Whither? Have you not heard? To Mine inheritance. You ask, Whither shall we go? To that which I bought with my blood. Whither then? To the nations, saith He. I fancied that He said, Go, **baptize the Africans in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.** Thanks be to God, the Lord has solved the question the dove has taught us. Thanks be to God, it was to the nations the apostles were sent; if to the nations, then to all tongues. The Holy Spirit signified this, being divided in the tongues, united in the dove. Here the tongues are divided, there the dove unites them. — Augustine, Tractate on the Gospel of John, 6.9-10⁶⁶

⁶⁶<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF1-07/npnf1-07-11.htm>

Augustine did the same in his *Homilies on 1 John*:

Moreover, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are "Witnesses," who that believes the Gospel can doubt, when the Son saith, "I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me, He beareth witness of me." Where, though the Holy Ghost is not mentioned, yet He is not to be thought separated from them. Howbeit neither concerning the Spirit hath He kept silence elsewhere, and that He too is a witness hath been sufficiently and openly shown. For in promising Him He said, "He shall bear witness of me." These are the "Three Witnesses, and the Three are One, because of one substance. But whereas, the signs by which they were signified came forth from the Body of the Lord, herein they figured the Church preaching the Trinity, that it hath one and the same nature: since these Three in threefold manner signified are One, and the Church that preacheth them is the Body of Christ. In this manner then the three things by which they are signified came out from the Body: of the Lord: like as from the Body of the Lord sounded forth **the command to "baptize the nations in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."** **"In the name:" not, In the names: for "these Three are One," and One God is these Three.** And if in any other way this depth of mystery which we read in John's epistle can be expounded and understood agreeably with the Catholic faith, which neither confounds nor divides the Trinity, neither believes the substances diverse nor denies that the persons are three, it is on no account to be rejected. For whenever in Holy Scriptures in order to exercise the minds of the faithful any thing is put darkly, it is to be joyfully welcomed if it can be in many ways but not unwisely expounded. – Augustine, *Homilies on 1 John*, Homily 10.⁶⁷

And yet again in his *Answer to Maximus the Arian* (A.D. 428):

[T]he Church that preaches that the Trinity is one and the same nature, because these three, who were signified in the three ways, are one. But the Church that preaches them is the body of Christ. Thus the three things by which they were signified came forth from the body of the Lord, just as we heard from the body of the Lord that the nations should be **baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In the name, not in the names; for these three are one, and these three are one God.** If the depth of this great mystery which we read in the Letter of John can be explained and understood in some other way in accord with the Catholic faith, that neither confuses nor divides the Trinity, neither denies the persons, nor believes they are different substances, we should on no account reject it. – Augustine, *Answer to Maximinus the Arian*, 2:22:3

Theodoret of Cyrus

Theodoret wrote a letter to Pope Leo I sometime between A.D. 431-437. In this letter, he makes it clear that the triune formula of Matthew 28:19 was pronounced verbally over the baptizand:

And what need is there of many words, when it is possible to refute falsehood in few? We provide that those who year by year come up for holy baptism should carefully learn the faith set forth at Nicaea by the holy and blessed Fathers; and initiating them as we have been bidden, we baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, pronouncing each name singly. – Theodoret of Cyrus, Letter 145⁶⁸

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Theodoret contrasts baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit with the baptism of heretics, heathen, and Jews who baptize in the name of angels or gods:

For the name of gods has been bestowed by God upon angels and all saints, **but of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost on account of their one and equal Godhead**, not the names of gods but the name of our God is predicated and proclaimed, that we may believe that **we are baptized in Father and Son and Holy Ghost and not in the names of archangels or angels, like the heretics or the Jews or foolish heathen.** – Theodoret of Cyrus, *Ecclesiastical History*, book five, ch 11⁶⁹

Ursinus

Jerome wrote a work called *On Illustrious Men* that provided a list of Christian scholars. Later, Gennadius added additional scholars to Jerome's work. He added a monk named Ursinus who opposed the

⁶⁷<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF1-07/npnf1-07-141.htm>

⁶⁸<https://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF2-03/Npnf2-03-23.htm>

⁶⁹<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/27025.htm>

rebaptism of heretics once they came to the orthodox faith, whether they were baptized INJC only or INFSHS. The fact that he speaks of two contrasting phrases indicates that Gennadius had baptismal formulas in mind. He even speaks of it as a “formula:”

Ursinus the monk wrote against those who say that heretics should be rebaptized, teaching that it is not legitimate nor honouring God, that those should be rebaptized who have been **baptized either in the name of Christ alone or in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, though the formula has been used in a vitiated sense.** He considers that after the simple confession of the Holy Trinity and of Christ, the imposition of the hands of the catholic priest is sufficient for salvation. – Gennadius' additions to Jerome's *On Illustrious Men*, ch 27⁷⁰

Interestingly, while Gennadius mentioned two baptismal formulas, he went on to speak of a singular “formula [that] has been used in a vitiated [adulterated] sense.” Which formula is he referring to? The Jesus’ name only formula, or the triune formula? It’s not clear. He could be referring to the Jesus’ name formula as an adulterated form of the correct, triune formula. Or, it’s possible that he is referring to either formula, and the adulteration of the formula is simply found in the fact that it was administered without a proper understanding of God. Either way, the fact that Ursinus did not require heretics who were baptized INJC to be rebaptized INFSHS shows that he thought baptism INJC was a legitimate baptismal formula.

Summary

We only have three witnesses and nine documents that speak to the baptismal formula in the fifth century – a significant decrease in data from the third and fourth centuries. This may indicate that the issue of baptismal formulas was essentially settled by this time and no longer an issue of much debate. As was the case in the previous three centuries, there is no evidence that anyone practiced silent baptism.

Three authors spoke of the triune formula (Augustine, Theodoret, and Ursinus), at least two of whom believed baptism should only be administered using the INFSHS formula (Augustine, Theodoret).

Only one author identifies “INJC” as a baptismal formula, and he must have thought it was an acceptable way to be baptized since he did not require those baptized INJC to be rebaptized (Ursinus). Augustine speaks of both heretics and the orthodox being baptized INJC, but he doesn’t appear to be using it as a baptismal formula.

Assessing the Historical Data

Now that we have looked at the historical data, let’s assess how well the data supports the four options I laid out at the beginning.

There Is No Baptismal Formula

If Jesus never intended and the apostles never used a baptismal formula, that would explain why different Christians came to use different baptismal formulas in the post-apostolic period. After all, many ceremonial traditions were added to the baptismal service very early in the church’s history, and there were no serious debates over the appropriateness of such additions to the apostolic tradition. It’s easy to see how a formulaic pronouncement over the baptizand would develop alongside fasting, triple dipping, a confession of faith, renouncing the Devil, and other ceremonial additions. It would also make sense as to why there was little debate over which formula to use: They did not have any apostolic tradition to work from. That’s why you don’t have any church fathers appealing to this apostle or that

⁷⁰<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2719.htm>

apostle as evidence against this or that baptismal formula. In the absence of apostolic tradition, and to begin a new tradition, most Christians simply used the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 as the formula (ignoring, or perhaps not even noticing, the fact that Acts and Paul could be used for a different formula). This would make sense for a number of reasons. First, Jesus' mention of the Father, Son, and Spirit coincided with the developing, Trinitarian theology of the post-apostolic church. Second, Jesus' words carry an intrinsic authority. Third, Jesus' words came on the heel of His command to baptize.

As appealing as this view might be to explain the use of different baptismal formulas, there is simply no historical evidence pointing to a period of time in the early, post-apostolic church where people were baptized without the use of a baptismal formula. Of course, we find a good number of authors and writings that do not specifically and unambiguously refer to a baptismal formula, but we cannot assume that this was because they did not use a formula. That would be arguing from silence. We would need some kind of positive evidence that formulas were not used. For example, a bishop describing how baptisms were performed in his city, and leaving out any mention of a verbal invocation over the baptizand. Or, we might expect to see debates between church leaders, with one group arguing that a baptismal formula is needed and another group arguing that baptismal formulas are not part of the apostolic tradition. We do not have either form of evidence.

RATING: I rate this option a "1" (very unlikely).

The Proper Baptismal Formula Is "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"

While there are plenty of historical records that speak of baptizing INFSHS or INJC without clearly identifying either phrase as a baptismal formula per se, our earliest records that explicitly identify a baptismal formula identify INFSHS as the only valid (or preferred) baptismal formula. While some church fathers saw both INJC and INFSHS as valid baptismal formulas, even they seem to have preferred INFSHS over INJC. The INJC formula was typically used by heretics, not the institutional church. There are simply no theologians or bishops from the institutional church who advocated for INJC as being *the* proper baptismal formula. At best, it was seen as permissible. Historically speaking, then, the evidence is overwhelming that the original and most widely used baptismal formula was INFSHS.

RATING: I rate this option a "5" (very likely).

The Proper Baptismal Formula Is "In the Name of Jesus Christ"

The historical evidence in favor of INJC being the original baptismal formula is scant. While we find groups of Christians baptizing INJC, they are almost always identified as heretical groups. While there is evidence that some institutional churches may have baptized INJC, there are no bishops in the post-apostolic church that advocated for the Jesus' name formula over and against the triune formula. At best, some bishops simply tolerated the use of the Jesus' name formula alongside the triune formula.

These historical facts pose a major problem to those who think INJC is the original, proper, and/or only valid baptismal formula. One would have to explain how the apostolic tradition of baptizing INJC could be so quickly eclipsed by a new baptismal formula with almost zero debate over the issue, and without a single bishop defending the Jesus' name formula against the new INFSHS formula. If INJC were the original baptismal formula, we would expect most bishops in the second century to be advocating for the INJC formula and only a minority of bishops advocating for INFSHS. Instead, we have no evidence of any bishops using the Jesus' name formula in the second or third centuries, and no evidence of any

fierce debates among bishops as to the correct apostolic tradition. This is inexplicable if INJC were the original baptismal formula, and thus the historical evidence argues strongly against the Jesus' name formula being used by the apostolic church.

RATING: I rate this option a "2" (somewhat unlikely).⁷¹

*Both "In the Name of the Father, Son, and Spirit" as well as
"In the Name of Jesus Christ" are Acceptable Baptismal Formulas*

If the apostolic church viewed both INJC and INFSHS as baptismal phrases, using one formula at times and the other formula at other times, this could explain why the post-apostolic church felt so free to speak of people being baptized INJC as well as INFSHS. They were interchangeable. And yet, very few authors in the post-apostolic period viewed both phrases as baptismal formulas. Even fewer viewed both as valid baptismal formulas, and no one preferred the Jesus' name formula over the triune formula. Most authors only mentioned or advocated for the triune formula. If the apostolic church understood both phrases as baptismal formulas, and used both as baptismal formulas, it is difficult to understand how the post-apostolic church came to jettison one of those baptismal formulas so quickly and so thoroughly. Why did they become so intolerant of one or the other formula? And if there was some trend to choose and use only one formula, why did every bishop choose the triune formula over the Jesus' name formula? We would expect for some bishops to line up behind the Jesus' name formula while others line up behind the triune formula, and yet, that is not what happened. This is strong evidence against the idea that the apostolic church used both phrases as baptismal formulas.

RATING: I rate this option a "1" (very unlikely).

ASSESSING THE BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL DATA

Now that we've investigated both the Biblical and historical data, which of our four options is most likely the right one? To determine this, I'll review my Biblical and historical ratings for each option, and average them out. I'll provide a straight average that gives equal weight to both the Biblical and historical data, as well as a weighted average that gives greater deference to the Biblical data (66.6% weight for the Biblical data and 33.3% weight for the historical data).⁷² Personally, I prefer the weighted average approach because I believe the Biblical data carries more weight than the historical data in terms of evidence.

⁷¹Arguably, this could be rated a "1" (very unlikely). I chose to rate it a "2," however, given the fact that we do have evidence that some people were baptizing INJC in the early centuries of the church. A "1" rating would only be justified if we had no evidence supporting the Jesus' name practice whatsoever.

⁷²A third way of averaging the data would be to give deference to the historical data over the Biblical data. I reject this approach because of my commitment to *sola Scriptura*. The Bible is our ultimate authority, not history. There is no circumstance in which we should give more deference to the thoughts, opinions, and practices of the post-apostolic church than we give to the Biblical data. While I think history can elucidate the Biblical data, it is not an authority equal to, or over Scripture.

There Is No Baptismal Formula

I rated the Biblical data a “3” and the historical data a “1” for this option. This averages out to be a “2” (somewhat unlikely). Using a weighted average, this option yields a score of “2.3.”

The Proper Baptismal Formula Is “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”

I rated the Biblical data a “2” and the historical data a “5” for this option. This averages out to be a “3.5,” which borders between possible and somewhat likely. Using a weighted average, this option yields a score of “3.”

The Proper Baptismal Formula Is “In the Name of Jesus Christ”

I rated the Biblical data a “5” and the historical data a “2” for this option. This averages out to be a “3.5,” which borders between possible and somewhat likely. Using a weighted average, this option yields a score of “4.”

Both “In the Name of the Father, Son, and Spirit” as well as “In the Name of Jesus Christ” are Acceptable Baptismal Formulas

I rated the Biblical data a “1” and the historical data a “1” for this option. This averages out to be a “1” (very unlikely) for both a regular and weighted average.

Summary

The idea that the apostles used two baptismal formulas scored an average of “1,” making this option the least likely. The second-lowest rating goes to the silent baptism option, with an average rating of “2” (or a weighted average of “2.3”). That leaves two options: (1) INFSHS is the original baptismal formula; (2) INJC is the original baptismal formula. Using a straight average, both yield the same score (“3.5”), and thus both are equally likely to be original. If, however, one thinks greater weight ought to be given to the Biblical data (as I do), INJC is more likely to be the original baptismal formula (“4” vs. “3”).

EXPLAINING THE INCONGRUENCE BETWEEN THE BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL DATA

I come from a tradition that believes baptism in the name of Jesus is the original and only baptismal formula used by the apostles. I happen to agree with that view. I think the Biblical data strongly favors INJC as the proper baptismal formula. And yet I must admit that the historical evidence is in tension with this Biblical interpretation. We would naturally expect that if the apostles baptized INJC, most Christians would still be doing so in the early post-apostolic period. And yet, that is not what we find in the historical record. There is no clear evidence that anyone was using the INJC formula in the second century – not even a minority of bishops/churches. All of our second century evidence points to the use of the triune formula. It’s not until the third century that we have evidence of anyone baptizing INJC, and it’s the fringe groups considered to be heretics who are doing so, not the institutional church.

If the apostles baptized INJC, but the post-apostolic church changed the practice to baptism INFSHS, we would also expect to see bishops debating the issue with other bishops given the importance of baptism and the baptismal ceremony in the early church. And yet, we have no record of any such debates in the second century. There was some debate in the third century, but the debate was not about which baptismal formula the institutional church should be using. All seemed to agree that the proper baptismal formula was INFSHS. The debate was over the validity of the baptism of heretics: If a heretic was baptized INJC, was his baptism valid, or did he need to be rebaptized (INFSHS) when he turned away from his heresy and embraced orthodoxy? Some bishops argued that his baptism was valid, even though these same bishops did not baptize INJC themselves. When there was debate, then, it was never a debate as to which formula the bishops should use in their own churches, but whether the baptism of heretics who baptized INJC should be recognized as legitimate. At best then, the INJC formula was tolerated by some bishops, but not preferred or practiced in their own congregations.

The fact that the only people we have clear evidence for baptizing INJC is heretics is problematic. While it's possible that these groups were preserving an apostolic tradition that the institutional church had all too quickly abandoned, we still have to ask how it was that the entirety of the institutional church could abandon this apostolic practice so quickly – not over a period of centuries, but seemingly over a period of mere decades.

Those of us who believe the Bible teaches that baptism ought to be administered in the name of Jesus Christ need to explain the incongruity between the Biblical data and the historical data. While it is not the intent of this paper to fully explain this incongruence between the Biblical and historical data, I will offer a few possible explanations for consideration.

1. The second-century evidence is sparse.

The authors/works that practiced baptism INFSHS are all from one geographical locale (the area of Rome). We don't know what the baptismal practices were in the other geographical regions of the church. It's possible that the baptismal practices of Roman Christians differed from that of Christians in other areas such as Antioch and Jerusalem.⁷³ Admittedly, this observation only makes space for the possibility that some parts of the church were still baptizing in Jesus' name. It does not demonstrate that they were. It only demonstrates that the historical evidence is very limited in the second century, and it may be too hasty to conclude that all the institutional churches were baptizing INFSHS.

2. The use of the triune formula would naturally increase as the church moved toward a Trinitarian understanding of God.

There is a clear relationship between one's doctrine of God and their baptismal formula. Those who adopt a Oneness/Modalist view of God tend to baptize INJC whereas those who adopt a Trinitarian view of God tend to baptize INFSHS. I don't think it is a coincidence that as the church became increasingly Gentile and less Jewish, and as the Logos Christology of the second century began to reshape the church's understanding of God by introducing distinctions within the Godhead, there would be a natural shift to using the triune formula of Matthew 28:19.

3. People thought it best to obey Jesus' exact words.

⁷³Scholars are not certain where the Didache was written, so it's possible that the Didache represents church teaching from a geographical locale other than Rome.

Believers want to obey what Jesus taught, and Jesus commanded that we be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While they may have noticed that the Acts of the Apostles described people as being baptized INJC rather than INFSHS, and while they may not have been able to explain the apparent discrepancy, when forced to choose between the two, they thought it safer to use Jesus' words over the apostles'. Jesus' words are the sure bet.

4. The post-apostolic church may not have thought the baptismal formula was unchangeable.

We know baptism was originally performed by full immersion, and yet some early church fathers began to baptize by dipping or sprinkling instead. Eventually, such practices won out and came to predominate in the church. In the same way that these church leaders saw the mode of baptism as being changeable, perhaps they also saw the baptismal formula as changeable.

5. A lot of baptismal tradition developed quickly in the post-apostolic period. Perhaps a shift in the baptismal formula was part of this rapid development.

When you study the history of the early church's baptismal theology and practices, it's amazing how quickly baptism went from being a very simple rite that people experienced on the day of their conversion to a very complex ritual that could take place long after your conversion. Different regions of the church quickly developed their own ceremonies and procedures for baptism. They differed in when you were baptized, how you were baptized, whether babies were eligible for baptism, what you wore, what you said, if you fasted, etc. Many practiced triple immersion, exorcisms, a renunciation of the devil, anointing with oil, confession of a baptismal creed, special garments, etc. When they felt so free to add so much to the baptismal rite, is it a stretch to think that they also felt free to change the baptismal formula to more closely align with their baptismal creeds and evolving doctrine of God?

6. The church quickly abandoned Biblical teaching on other matters, too.

False teaching arose quickly in the church, and not just after the apostles died. The apostles had to contend with all sorts of false teachings and heresies that arose within the church in their own lifetimes. If believers were prone to go off the theological rails while the apostles were still alive, how much more once they died and could not correct the false teaching?

We can point to a number of doctrines where the post-apostolic church quickly went off the theological rails. Consider the doctrine of God. As Gentiles came to predominate in the church, they brought their Gentile philosophical background with them. In some cases, their philosophical presuppositions colored their Biblical interpretation. They quickly abandoned the strict Jewish monotheism of the early church. The logos Christology of the second century was the seedbed for what came to be a Trinitarian view of God that predominated by the late fourth century.

The same could be said of the doctrine of justification and grace. Good works were quickly added to the requirement for salvation. Or, think of the doctrine of divorce and remarriage. Very quickly, the church took a no remarriage position, even when one's spouse committed adultery. Why? Because the church so quickly lost touch with its Jewish roots, and Gentiles lacked the Jewish background of Jesus' teachings. If the church could so quickly move away from Biblical teaching on these matters, it's not far-fetched to think they may have done the same on the issue of the baptismal formula.

CONCLUSION

We might wish that the Bible were clearer on the topic of baptismal formulas, but the fact of the matter is that we are left with ambiguities, questions, and uncertainties. Good arguments can be made for at least four points of view on the matter, and good counter-arguments can be made against each as well. The same is true of the historical data. While we might wish for more sources, earlier sources, and unambiguous data, that's not what has been afforded to us. History is incomplete, unclear, messy, and open to different interpretations. And yet, I think the historical data is clear in a number of respects:

- There was no debate over silent baptism versus using a baptismal formula. Our witnesses either don't speak to the issue of baptismal formulas at all, affirm the veracity of the triune formula, or debate which formulas are valid and which are not.
- There was very little debate over the proper baptismal formula, particularly in the second century where we would expect to see it most. The evidence from the second century indicates churches were using the triune formula.⁷⁴ There is no evidence of churches using the Jesus' name formula, and no debate between bishops as to whether INFSHS or INJC is the proper formula. By the third century, we have more evidence of churches using the triune formula⁷⁵, some evidence of churches using the Jesus' name formula,⁷⁶ and minimal debate as to whether baptism INJC was an acceptable formula. The debates between bishops, however, was not whether orthodox churches should baptize INJC or INFSHS, but whether heretics who had been baptized INJC needed to be rebaptized.⁷⁷
- There is very little evidence that the institutional church was using the Jesus' name formula. It was mostly groups considered to be heretical by the bishops of the institutional church who used this formula.⁷⁸ Such groups would always be fewer in number compared to the orthodox.
- Fifteen authors spoke of baptism INJC,⁷⁹ but only six clearly identify INJC as a baptismal formula (three explicitly⁸⁰, three implicitly⁸¹). Only four of those who refer to INJC as a baptismal formula indicate that they thought it was an acceptable way to be baptized.⁸² At least three of them, however, preferred the triune formula over the Jesus' name formula.⁸³

⁷⁴Didache 2nd c., Justin Martyr 2nd c.

⁷⁵Tertullian 3rd c., Hippolytus 3rd c., Origen 3rd c., Cyprian 3rd c., Basil 3rd c.

⁷⁶Cyprian 3rd c., On Rebaptism 3rd c.,

⁷⁷On Rebaptism 3rd c., Cyprian 3rd c., Firmilian 3rd c., Basil 3rd c.

⁷⁸On Rebaptism 3rd c., Cyprian 3rd c., Firmilian 3rd c., Apostolic Constitutions 4th c.

⁷⁹Didache 2nd c., Irenaeus 2nd c., Shepherd of Hermas 2nd c., Acts of Paul and Thecla 2nd c., Irenaeus 2nd c., On Rebaptism 3rd c., Cyprian 3rd c., Seventh Council of Carthage 3rd c., Firmilian 3rd c., Pseudo-Clement 4th c., Apostolic Constitutions 4th c., Ambrose 4th c., Athanasius 4th c., Ursinus 5th c.

⁸⁰On Rebaptism 3rd c., Ambrose 4th c., Apostolic Constitutions 4th c.

⁸¹Cyprian 3rd c., Athanasius 4th c., Ursinus 5th c.

⁸²On Rebaptism 3rd c., Ambrose 4th c., Cyprian 3rd c., Ursinus 5th c. Cyprian clearly indicates that he thought it was acceptable for Jews to be baptized INJC (pointing to Scriptural examples), but he did not think it was acceptable for Gentiles and heretics to be baptized this way. It's not clear whether he thought it was acceptable for anyone in his day to be baptized INJC.

⁸³Ursinus may be an exception. We simply do not have enough of his writings to know if he preferred one formula over the other. All we know is that he accepted both.

- Nineteen authors clearly identify INFSHS as the baptismal formula.⁸⁴ Three others appeal to Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19 in the context of baptism, but do not clearly identify INFSHS as a baptismal formula.⁸⁵
- A decent number of church fathers addressed the difference between Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19 and the data in Acts and Paul.⁸⁶ All argued that Acts and Paul did not contradict the triune formula. None of them thought the singular "name" of Matthew 28:19 pointed to the name of Jesus.

Ultimately, whether one decides that INJC or INFSHS is more likely to be the original baptismal formula depends on how they assess the data. If you think it's fairer to give equal weight to the Biblical and historical data, then you will find yourself at an impasse since the data supports both formulas equally. However, if you think one ought to give more weight to the Biblical data (as I do), then you will conclude that the Jesus' name formula is more likely to be original. Either way, those on both sides of the INFSHS vs. INJC debate should recognize that a strong case can be made for the other side. Those who advocate for the originality of the triune formula can make a decent Biblical case and a really strong historical case for their view, while those who advocate for the originality of the Jesus' name formula can make a really strong Biblical case for their view, but will struggle a bit more to justify their view historically.

Let me end with a couple of caveats. I am not a historian, and I am not an expert in the writings of the church fathers. The historical data I present in this paper was discovered largely by using the search engine at <https://www.bible.ca/>. I searched on key phrases such as "in the name of the Lord," "in the name of Jesus," "in the name of Christ," and "in the name of the Father" to identify early Christian works that might speak about the baptismal formula. It's entirely possible that my search failed to turn up other authors or other works that spoke to the baptismal formula issue using different terminology. It's also possible that I have misinterpreted one or more of the texts that I cite. I did my best to show each citation in its context, and in most cases, I read more of the context than I included in this paper. That said, I did not have the time to read the entirety of every work I quoted from, and thus it's possible that I did not read enough context to draw the proper interpretation. I consider this paper to be a work in progress, and am open to updating it with new information or correcting any errors.

Finally, let me say a word about my rating system. There is no question that the ratings I assigned to the Biblical and historical data is entirely subjective, reflecting my own point of view on the matter. However, I think my methodology is fair, and I tried to be as objective as possible with the data.

⁸⁴Didache 2nd c., Justin Martyr 2nd c., Tertullian 3rd c., Hippolytus 3rd c., Origen 3rd c., Cyprian 3rd c., Basil 3rd c., Council of Arles 4th c., Pseudo-Clement 4th c., Cyril 4th c., Hilary of Poitiers 4th c., Athanasius 4th c., Apostolic Constitutions 4th c., Ambrose 4th c., Gregory Nyssa 4th c., John Chrysostom 4th c., Augustine 5th c., Theodore 5th c., Ursinus 5th c.

⁸⁵Seventh Council of Carthage 3rd c., Gregory Nazianzus 4th c., Jerome 4th c.

⁸⁶Origen 3rd c., On Rebaptism 3rd c., Cyprian 3rd c., Basil 3rd c., Hilary of Poitiers 4th c., Ambrose 4th c., Gregory Nazianzus 4th c. Augustine (5th c.) does not address the differences between the triune and Jesus' name formula, but he does explain why Jesus used the singular "name" in Matthew 28:19.