

## baptism

*Robert A. J. Gagnon*

191 Although water rituals were common in other religions of antiquity, water baptism took on a distinctive prominence in early Christianity as the sole or primary entry rite into the faith. According to Ephesians 4:5, "one baptism" is one of the marks of the unity of the church. Yet, ironically, it has come to symbolize the disunity of the church throughout history, owing to disagreements at several points: meaning (sacrament or symbol), mode (submersion, immersion, pouring, and/or sprinkling), and recipients (whether or not to include infants and very young children). The fact that the practice of water baptism has become a source not just of disagreement but also of division is attributable to the fact that in the church water baptism came to overshadow the reality that it only symbolized and partly mediated; namely, being "baptized in the Holy Spirit." (As proof of this observation, most readers will expect this entry to be almost entirely about a water ritual.) Although consciousness of being "baptized in the Holy Spirit" made a resurgence in the modern era through the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements, it has been weakened by two misunderstandings: that baptism in the Spirit is an experience distinct from true conversion and that it requires as its almost exclusive manifestation speaking in tongues.

### ANTECEDENT INFLUENCES ON CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

The primary antecedent for Christian "baptism" (both in water and in Spirit) lay in John the Baptizer's use of immersion in the Jordan River as a rite for fellow Jews demonstrating repentance in the face of God's coming apocalyptic judgment (Mark 1:2-11; Matt. 3:1-17; Luke 3:1-22; Acts 1:5; 13:24-25; 19:4;

John 1:19-37; 3:23). According to the Gospel accounts, John himself made clear the main difference between his baptism and the baptism of the coming one: the former was with or in water, the latter in or with Spirit and (according to Matt./Luke) fire. Although John's baptism was eschatological (i.e. having the end of the Old Age in view), it was once removed on the eschatological timeline relative to the Spirit baptism of the one coming after him. The major influences on John's baptism (and thus secondary antecedents to Christian baptism) may have been the Qumran community's use of a water rite as part of an annual ceremony for admission (1QS 3.4-9) and early Judaism's use of a water rite as part of the rites of initiation for Gentile proselytes (along with circumcision and sacrifice). There is debate about the latter, however, as regards date (was it a requirement in pre-70 Judaism?) and function (was its main purpose in its earliest history cultic purification as a preliminary act to the sacrifice or did it have broader moral purity ramifications?). Unlike John's baptism and Christian baptism, the Qumran entry rite and proselyte baptism were self-administered; proselyte baptism did not apply to Jews; and the Qumran bath at admission was continued daily before the common meal rather than a unique, one-time act. Tertiary antecedents for Christian baptism include: ritual bathing of "one's whole body" prescribed in the law of Moses for various discharges and impurities (Lev. 14-17; Num. 19:19; esp. leprosy and corpse impurity); the story of the Gentile Naaman's baptizing himself in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:14); the daily immersion of Jewish priests and their immediate families, members of ritual purity societies (*haburoth*) who ate even ordinary food in a state of ritual purity, Qumran members as a requirement for partaking of the communal "pure meal" (1QS 6.13-23), and self-perceived holy men (cf. Bannus in Josephus, *Life* 11); and water rites that served as preliminary purification for an encounter with the divine in Greco-Roman mystery cults (e.g. Demeter at Eleusis, Isis, Mithras, Asclepius).

vol. 1:190-

206

*The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, First Edition. Edited by George Thomas Kurian.  
© 2011 Blackwell Publishing Ltd. Published 2011 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass.

## 2 baptism

### THE MEANING OF “BAPTIZE” IN THE GRECO-ROMAN AND JEWISH CONTEXT

As transliterations, “baptism” (Gk. *baptisma* or *baptismos*) and “to baptize” (Gk. *baptizō*) have taken on in the modern church a technical sense as a Christian ritual. In the Greco-Roman world, however, *baptizō* broadly referred to the act of *bringing under the controlling influence of, or as though of, a liquid, typically water*. The meaning “dip,” if understood to mean a partial immersion, is usually reserved for the related verb *baptō*, of which *baptizō* is the intensive form. The normal mode of “baptizing” was that of covering, surrounding, or overrunning with water, usually by “immersing” or “plunging” below the surface, thus “submerging.” Hence the verb is frequently used in the passive for ships <sup>192</sup> sinking or people drowning. Associated imagery often involved stormy seas and rivers – in general, watery destruction. For example, Josephus, the 1st century CE Jewish historian, compares committing suicide before the arrival of the Roman army to a pilot of a ship “who, for fear of a tempest, deliberately *sinks* his ship before the storm” (*J.W.* 3 §368, LCL). He describes Herod’s murder of Aristobulus as an act of some of Herod’s friends, who “kept pressing him down [in the pool] and *holding him under water* as if in sport, and they did not let up until they had suffocated him” (Josephus, *Ant.* §55, LCL; cf. *J.W.* 1 §437). Another meaning, though much less common, is “drench” (e.g. Eubulus [4th century BC] frag. 68). Occasionally it means to “immerse,” “wash,” or “bathe” the body for purposes of purification (2 Kings 5:14 LXX [of Naaman]; Sir 34:30; Jth. 12:7; Plutarch, *Brut. an.* 990E; *Superst.* 166A).

Unlike the modern near-total fixation on a literal (and Christian) water rite, metaphorical uses, especially for the verb, were commonplace in the Greco-Roman world and expanded the range of meanings to include (for the passive): “being in over one’s head,” “getting into deep water,” or “being inundated, deluged, flooded, engulfed, doused, overwhelmed, swamped, enveloped.” It was applied to items as varied as sleep, over-consumption, superior rhetoric, heavy taxation or debts, passions and worldly interests, persecution and destruction. Modern blindness to metaphorical uses has inhibited most from seeing that Pauline references to

being baptized into Christ or Christ’s body are first and foremost metaphorical references to baptism in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3; cf. 1 Cor. 10:2). The metaphorical use for personal endangerment in the Jesus saying in Mark 10:38–39 (cf. Luke 12:50) sounds odd to us but would not have been unusual in the 1st century: “Are you able . . . to be baptized [i.e. deluged, inundated, flooded, submerged, doused, drenched] with the baptism [i.e. deluge, etc.] that I am being baptized?” (cf. the application of the imagery of being in over one’s head in deep waters to persecution in, e.g. Pss. 69:1–2, 14–15; 124:4–5). The following examples of metaphorical use from Josephus are typical. When Salome announced to Herod that his sons had warned her about Herod’s plot to kill her, “this, like a final storm culminating a series of storms, *submerged* [or: *swamped, drownded, sank*] the youths” (*J.W.* 1 §535). The people of Jotapata pleaded with the commander Josephus not to leave the city, arguing that “it would be improper for him . . . to jump off as if from a storm-tossed boat . . . for he would *plunge* the city *into ruin*” (*J.W.* 3 §196). The influx of all the brigands into Jerusalem “*flooded*” [or: *sank, wrecked*] the city” through their consumption of the city’s limited provisions (*J.W.* 4 §137).

Finally, *baptizō* is sometimes used in connection with complete intoxication by alcohol, where it could be translated (again, for the passive) as: “gone under, soused, tanked, stewed, soaked.” The connection shows that the controlling influence of a liquid can be conveyed in different ways, even if the usual mode is submersion. Being intoxicated with wine is sometimes compared or contrasted with being baptized in the Spirit (Acts 2:4, 13–15) and “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18); possibly the image lies in the background of Paul’s remark that believers were “made to drink one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13b).

### TWO BAPTISMS: A LITERAL WATER RITE AND A METAPHORICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ONE-TIME GIFT OF THE SPIRIT AT CONVERSION

Although Ephesians 4:5 speaks of “one baptism,” the NT distinguishes between a literal water baptism and a metaphorical “baptism in the Spirit” even as it often keeps them in close

association. According to the Gospels and Acts, John the Baptizer *contrasted* his own baptism “with [or: in (simple dat.)] water” with the future baptism of a coming one who “will baptize in [or: with (*en*)] the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; cf. Acts 1:5; 11:16). This distinction between water baptism and Spirit baptism within a context of association is maintained in the Gospel story of Jesus’ reception of the Spirit and in the Acts stories of the baptism in the Spirit experienced by the Twelve at Pentecost, the Samaritans, and the Gentile Cornelius. This same distinction-within-association can be found in Paul. On the one hand Paul understands baptismal burial “into Christ” to be typically mediated in some way “through [water] baptism” (Rom. 6:3; cf. Col. 2:12). On the other hand he cautions against quasi-magical baptismal sacramentalism and emphasizes the primary role of faith (believing the gospel and believing in Christ) in mediating the palpable reception (and ongoing experience) of the Spirit.

193

EQUIVALENT EXPRESSIONS FOR BEING  
“BAPTIZED IN THE SPIRIT” AND THE  
QUESTION OF A “SECOND BLESSING”

Luke explicitly identifies the future baptism in the Spirit announced by John the Baptizer with the reception of the Spirit both by the first disciples at Pentecost (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5; 2:33) and later by the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 11:16). This link helps us to identify other synonymous expressions for being “baptized in the Holy Spirit”: the “pouring out” of the Spirit (Acts 2:17–18 [= Joel 3:1–2]; 2:33; 10:45; cf. Rom. 5:5); the Spirit’s “falling on” people (Acts 8:16; 10:44; 11:15) or “coming upon” people (Acts 1:8; 19:6; cf. Matt. 3:16); Jesus’ “sending” of the Spirit (Luke 24:49; cf. John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Gal. 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:12); God’s “gift of the Spirit” (Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17; cf. John 4:10; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; Heb. 6:4) and “giving” of the Spirit (Acts 5:32; 8:18; 11:17; 15:8; cf. John 3:34; 14:17; 1 Thess. 4:8; 2 Cor. 1:22), which believers “receive” (Acts 2:33, 38; 8:15, 17, 19; 10:47; 19:2; cf. John 20:2; Gal. 3:2, 14; etc.) and by which believers “clothe [themselves] with power (coming) from a high place” (i.e. heaven; Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:8: “receiving power”); and being

“filled with” the Spirit (Acts 2:4; cf. of Paul’s conversion, 9:17).

These metaphors describe not a “second blessing” of the Spirit, distinct from the reception of the Spirit at conversion (as modern Pentecostal theology supposes), but the first reception of the gift of the Spirit. Only the metaphor of being “filled with” or “full of” the Spirit is also used by Luke for special moments of empowerment during persecution (4:8, 31; 7:55; 13:9) and for the ongoing Christian life that is markedly under the Spirit’s control (11:24; 13:52; cf. Eph. 5:18–20). Even this expression, though, does not refer to a distinct “second blessing.” The baptism in, or gift of, the Holy Spirit is received, along with forgiveness of sins, through repentance and believing the gospel/believing in Christ. This is emphasized in the case of the crowd at Pentecost (2:38), Paul (9:17–18; 22:16), the Gentile Cornelius and his associates (10:43–45; 11:14–18; 15:7–9), and the disciples of John the Baptizer at Ephesus (19:2–6).

Some have pointed to the disciples’ experience at Pentecost (2:1–4) and the experience of the Samaritan believers (8:4–24) as strong evidence for the baptism in the Spirit as a distinct “second blessing” after an initial gift of the Spirit. However, in neither situation did the disciples possess the Spirit as an indwelling power prior to being baptized in the Spirit. Consequently, there was no “first blessing” prior to receiving Spirit baptism. As regards Pentecost, Luke is clear that Jesus could “send” and “pour out” the promised Holy Spirit only “after he had been lifted up to the right hand of God and had received from the Father the promised Spirit” (Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33). Indeed, in a real sense, faith in Christ as the exalted Lord was possible only after Jesus’ ascension. According to Luke, Peter later described the Spirit baptism of Cornelius and his household as God giving the latter “the equal gift as also to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ” at Pentecost (11:17). In the case of the Samaritan believers (Acts 8:4–24), who were regarded as “half Jews” (and thus a transitional stage to an outreach to Gentiles), there was an unusually long delay between their water baptism and their reception of the Holy Spirit, requiring Peter and John to come from Jerusalem to pray and lay their hands on them “that they might receive the Holy

Spirit” (8:15). The reason for the delay probably had to do with the necessity, in Luke’s view, of tying the beginning of each of the three great stages of mission (Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria, Gentile nations) to authorization by apostles, who were witnesses to Jesus’ earthly ministry from his baptism to his resurrection (Luke 24:47–48; Acts 1:8).

Although the Fourth Evangelist did not make the connection explicit, there is little doubt that he identified being “baptized in the Holy Spirit” (1:33; cf. 3:34) with being “born from the Spirit” and “born from above” (3:3–8). Since being “born from the Spirit” is a requirement for inheriting eternal life, it is clearly not an optional “second blessing” (cf. Titus 3:5 for the metaphor of rebirth by the Spirit as a reference to conversion: God “saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly”). Also likely is an identification of Spirit baptism with the image in 7:38 of having “rivers of living water” flowing “out of one’s belly” (7:38). Those who believed in Jesus would not receive this Spirit until Jesus had been “glorified” and “gone away” (7:39; 14:16–26; 15:26; 16:7, 13–15, 22). The action of the risen Christ in breathing on the disciples and saying “Receive the Holy Spirit” should be viewed either as the sole “Johannine Pentecost” or, more likely, as an anticipatory symbolic act.

Paul modified the expression “baptize in/with (*en*) the Holy Spirit” in a way consistent with his preference for “in Christ” language over “in the Spirit” language. The authors of the Gospels and Acts understood the *en* preceding “Holy Spirit” as denoting primarily manner (“with”) and secondarily locale (“in”), contrasting Spirit baptism to John’s baptism “with” or “in” water (simple dative case or *en* plus dative). However, Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13 understood the *en* as denoting means and then identified the entity “into” (*eis*) which believers are “immersed” or “plunged” as Christ’s body or (as in Gal. 3:27 and Rom. 6:3) Christ himself. A composite of the full Pauline expression would be: “baptized by the Spirit into Christ.” He equated this being “baptized into Christ (or Christ’s body) by the Spirit, which “we all” experienced (1 Cor. 12:13), with being made to drink (or: being watered with) “one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13b), “clothing yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:27b), coming to be “in Christ” (Gal. 3:29), dying

with Christ (Rom. 6:2–11), and an assortment of other expressions denoting conversion events.

#### JESUS’ “BAPTISM”

Although never explicitly referred to as a baptism in the Spirit, Jesus’ reception of the Spirit functions as such. The images of being “anointed with the Holy Spirit and power” (Acts 10:38) and of the Spirit “coming down” or “descending” are similar to descriptions of the baptism in the Spirit as a clothing of oneself with (or receiving) “power” and as a “coming upon” or “falling on” of the Spirit. The Spirit descends only after Jesus was baptized, either while Jesus was climbing out of the Jordan River onto the bank (Mark 1:10) or after Jesus had done so (Matt. 3:16; in Luke 3:21–22 the Spirit’s descent is connected to prayer; cf. Luke 11:13; Acts 1:14; 8:15). Insofar as the Gospel accounts are explicit that John the Baptizer did not “baptize in the Holy Spirit,” Jesus’ reception of the Spirit cannot be attributed directly to John’s baptism but only indirectly to Jesus’ submission to God’s will in his final act within the Old Age (cf. Matt. 3:15: “. . . to fulfill all righteousness”). As if to underscore this, Luke narrates John’s arrest before he narrates Jesus’ baptism (Luke 3:18–20) while the Fourth Evangelist doesn’t even tell of Jesus’ submission to a water rite (though it is obliquely implied; John 1:31–34). Still, in describing Jesus’ “baptism” the Gospels bring into close association water baptism and Spirit baptism, with the literal water rite anticipating, in symbol and as an expression of repentance or (in Jesus’ case) submission, a safe passage through the metaphorical reality of a coming fiery deluge. An additional issue is whether this was a distinct “second blessing” of the Spirit on Jesus’ life. Several texts in Luke may suggest that, in Luke’s view, Jesus possessed the Spirit prior to his baptism (1:15, 31–35; 2:47–52). Yet Luke makes nothing of a pre-baptismal possession of the Spirit in the speeches in Acts but rather appears to locate Jesus’ anointing “with the Holy Spirit and with power” (10:48) at the start of his ministry. If Luke did think in terms of two different bestowals of the Spirit to Jesus, he gives no indication anywhere in Acts that a two-stage bestowal of the Spirit existed for believers. One might think of Jesus operating out of a unique situation of possessing the Spirit in two different ways, first

in an old covenant sense and then, after his post-baptismal reception of the Spirit, in a new covenant sense.

#### WATER BAPTISM IN ACTS IN ITS RELATION TO FAITH AND SPIRIT

195 Luke in Acts clearly differentiates water baptism and Spirit baptism, even as he notes their close connection. Sometimes it has no bearing in mediating Spirit baptism, as with the disciples at Pentecost (who seem not to undergo Christian baptism, 2:1–4), Cornelius and his household associates (who are baptized in water after being baptized in Spirit, as a confirmatory rite for the church, 10:47; 11:17), and Apollos (18:24–28). As regards Philip's Samaritan mission, Luke comments succinctly that the Holy Spirit "had not yet fallen upon any of them, but they had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16). The Samaritan episode does, however, follow the normal order put forward in Acts: believe – water baptism – gift of (i.e. baptism in) the Holy Spirit. Peter declares to the crowd at Pentecost, "Repent and let each of you be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38; cf. 2:41). Water baptism aptly conveys the image of washing away of sins in part by the enveloping action of the Holy Spirit (22:16; cf. 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5). The order faith–baptism–Spirit is preserved also in the stories of the conversion of Paul (9:17–18; 22:14–15) and the disciples of John at Ephesus (19:1–7, though with the laying on of hands intervening). In a number of other instances where the Spirit is not explicitly mentioned (but may be presumed), the order faith–baptism is also maintained: the Ethiopian eunuch (8:35–6, 38–39; cf. the addition of v. 37 regarding the eunuch's faith, found in some Western-type mss.), Lydia at Philippi (16:14–15), the Philippian jailer and his household (16:31–34), and "many of the Corinthians" (18:8).

In all these accounts the pivotal role in the reception of the Spirit is played by faith in Christ or "calling upon his name," not water baptism. In Peter's speech in Acts 2, the quotation of Joel ends with the citation of Joel 2:32: "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). In the story of Paul's

encounter with the 12 disciples of John the Baptizer at Ephesus (Acts 19:1–17), Luke's Paul asks the disciples: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit *on believing?*" (19:2) – not "when you were baptized." They are then told that John's message on how to receive the Spirit was "to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus" (19:5). Although the Philippian jailer and his "household" are baptized in water, Paul's response to the jailer's initial question, "What must I do to be saved?" is simply "Believe on the Lord Jesus" (16:30–31). There are repeated occurrences in Acts where a call is made to repent and/or believe in Christ in order to be saved, without any mention of a water rite (3:16–20; 4:4; 5:31–32; 8:22; 13:38–39; 17:30; 20:21; 26:18, 20; also Luke 24:47). To be sure, Paul later recounts Ananias' message to him as "have yourself baptized and wash away your sins"; but he adds that the "washing away" is accomplished "by calling upon his name" (22:16). Recounting the conversion of Cornelius and his associates, Peter states that, like Jewish followers of Jesus, God "gave them the Holy Spirit" and "cleansed their hearts by faith," not by a water rite (15:9; cf. 11:17–18). Thus, even when referring to the action of washing and cleansing, Luke locates the essential causative factors in faith and Spirit-baptism, not water baptism.

This picture of water baptism as the normal, but not indispensable, element between faith on the one hand and both forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit on the other is consistent with what we know elsewhere in early Judaism regarding water rites. For example, both in the Qumran description of the ritual bath for the ceremony of admission (IQS 3:4–5, 8–9; cf. 5:13–14) and in the description of John's baptism in "Q" (Luke 3:7–9 // Matt. 3:7–10) and Josephus (*Ant.* 18 §117), it is the intent to live righteously expressed by means of the baptism, not the water rite per se, that cleanses the heart or soul of the person. Similarly, the author of 1 Peter states that believers are "saved through water" in baptism, just as Noah's family was in the flood, but then quickly adds that salvation did not come by "a putting off of dirt from the flesh but (by) a request [i.e. appeal; or: pledge] to God of [or: for] a good conscience" (3:20–22). In other words, water baptism has a saving effect not as a literal washing of the body but as an expression of commitment to God.

WATER BAPTISM IN JOHN AND PAUL IN ITS  
RELATION TO FAITH AND SPIRIT

As with Luke's Acts, John's Gospel also both associates and differentiates water baptism and Spirit baptism. It provides the otherwise unattested report that Jesus, or at least his disciples, was baptizing "at Aenon near Salim," while John the Baptizer was still baptizing, and "making and baptizing more disciples than John" (3:22–26; 4:1–2). For the Fourth Evangelist this clearly had nothing to do with Spirit baptism since, as noted above, Jesus could perform the latter function only after his return to heaven. Nevertheless, that statement by the narrator in 4:1 that water baptism was a vehicle for "making disciples" (cf. Matt. 28:19), combined with Jesus' statement to Nicodemus in 3:5 that "unless someone is born from *water and* Spirit he is not able to enter the kingdom of God," suggests the significance of water baptism as an entry rite for the Johannine community. A number of factors indicate that the significance of water baptism in 3:5 lay not in some quasi-magical sacramentalism but rather in its capacity as a public demonstration of allegiance to Jesus. For by being baptized in water crypto-Christians in the pattern of Nicodemus are "outed" and their Christology forced to heighten amidst a threatening environment (cf. the story of the blind man in John 9). That this is the import of water baptism in John is suggested by the following: the ensuing context's sole focus on birth "from the Spirit" (3:6–8; i.e. water drops out); the broader context of Nicodemus' reticent Christianity and low Christology as a representative Judean (2:23–3:2), along with Jesus' encouragement to come into the light and make public one's faith in him (3:19–21); and the fact that elsewhere in John the reception of the Spirit is attributed not to water baptism but to believing in Jesus, loving him, and keeping his commandments (7:38–39; 14:23). Indeed, the role given in John's Gospel to water baptism in the salvation process is minuscule relative to the role given believing in Christ (about 80 references).

In Paul, too, the role of water baptism in relation to faith and Spirit baptism is mixed. On the one hand, Paul apparently sees some significance to water baptism for he refers in Romans 6:4 to believers being "buried with [Christ] *through the baptism* into his death"

(though it is just possible that the reference here is also metaphorical, alluding to the aforementioned metaphor for the Spirit's action: "we were baptized into his death"). Similarly, Colossians 2:12 refers to "having been buried with him in the [or: your] baptism." The references in Romans 6:3, 1 Corinthians 12:13, and Galatians 3:27 to being "baptized into Christ" or "... into [Christ's] body" are, in the first instance at least, metaphors of the Spirit's activity ("by means of one Spirit," 1 Cor. 12:13), as are the accompanying references to being "made to drink [or: watered with] one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13b), "clothing yourselves with Christ" (Gal. 3:27b), and being "buried with him" (Rom. 6:4). They clearly recall the Christian rite of water baptism even as they refer directly and metaphorically to spiritual realities that water baptism so well symbolizes. Although the phrase "through ... baptism" in Romans 6:4 does not appear in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:27, it may be presumed there: people are baptized by the Spirit into Christ (viz., through water baptism). This is further suggested by the fact that Paul's typological reference to the Israelites being "baptized into Moses in [i.e. by means of] the cloud and in the sea" and both eating "the same spiritual food" and drinking "the same spiritual drink" (1 Cor. 10:2–4) are aimed at the Corinthians' quasi-magical view of water baptism and the Lord's Supper. Paul may have viewed water baptism not only as a symbolic reenactment of Christ's death, burial, and new life but also as the normal vehicle for bringing to full expression the faith of the believer that issues in Spirit baptism into Christ.

On the other hand, as in John's Gospel, the references to water baptism in the Pauline corpus are dwarfed by the attention given to faith in Christ and the vivid experience of the Spirit's work. In Galatians Paul explicitly and directly connects receiving the Spirit with believing the gospel or faith in Christ (3:2, 5, 14, 22; 5:5), as also Christ living in one with living in faith (2:20; cf. 2 Cor. 13:5; Eph. 3:17). Only in 1 Corinthians does Paul give any significant explicit attention to water baptism and there it is mostly critical of the Corinthians' quasi-magical interpretation of the rite. The Corinthians apparently had a schismatic proclivity to attach themselves to the person who baptized them (1:10–17; most compare this to the attachment

197 that an initiate into Greek mysteries might give the mystagogue; but compare also the disciples of John the Baptizer in Ephesus in Acts 19:1–7). They apparently believed that their participation in Christian baptism and the Lord’s Supper made it impossible for them to lose their salvation (1 Cor. 10:1–22). Some may even have had themselves baptized vicariously “for (*hyper*) the dead” (15:29), though the interpretation of this text is disputed. (If it refers to vicarious baptism why doesn’t Paul correct it? Does he plan to use this practice by some now to argue against their ridicule of a resurrection from the dead and later to correct their misinterpretation when he revisits Corinth [4:19; 11:34; 16:2–7]? Or does Paul mean “baptized for the sake of [their own] dead [bodies]”? Or “baptized on account of the dead,” i.e. on account of their belief that they will one day be raised with Christ?) Against their view of baptism, Paul argues that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not guarantees of eternal security for those who dabble in idolatry and sexual immorality (10:6–12, 21–22). Paul declares that he is actually thankful that he baptized hardly any of the Corinthians since baptizing more persons would only have furthered the divisions at Corinth (1:14–16). It may be, as some have argued, that Paul could count on others at Corinth to do the baptizing in his stead (cf. 12:13). Nevertheless, there is no way that Paul could have said about the proclamation of the gospel, “I thank God that I was not the one who proclaimed the gospel to you.” Indeed, he says the opposite: “Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel” (1:17; cf. John 4:1). For God “save[s], through the foolishness of the proclamation, those who believe,” not in the first instance those who submit to a water rite (1:21; cf. 15:1–2; 2:5; 3:5; 14:22; 15:11, 14, 17; 16:13). Treating baptism as an indispensable, quasi-magical sacrament, especially one that guarantees salvation, is to adopt the Corinthian view rather than Paul’s.

“BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST” AND “BAPTIZED INTO THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS”

Although some argue otherwise, “baptized into Christ” is not simply shorthand for “baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.” “Baptized [i.e. immersed, plunged] into Christ” (Rom. 6:3;

Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13) is something that God does by means of the Spirit of Christ for those who believe in Christ; namely, incorporate believers into union with Christ. To “baptize into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16; 19:5; *Did.* 9.5; cf. Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 1:13, 15; *Did.* 7.1, 3) is something that the baptizer does by means of water baptism for those who believe in Christ; namely, place them into allegiance to the person of Christ.

As context makes clear, “immersed/plunged into Christ” is participationist, union-with-Christ incorporation language. The phrase denotes God’s “joining” of believers to Christ by means of the indwelling gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:15–19; cf. 15:45: Christ “became a life-making Spirit”) so that believers are made parts or “members” of Christ’s “one body” through joint possession of his one Spirit (1 Cor. 6:15; 12:12–27), have “clothed [themselves] with Christ” (Gal. 3:27b; cf. Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8), have “Christ living in” them “by faith” (Gal. 2:19–20; cf. 5:25), become “one person in Christ Jesus” and Abraham’s single “seed” or “offspring” (Gal. 3:28–29; cf. 4:6), and have “died with,” “been buried with,” and (at least in an “as if” sense) been raised with Christ through the experience of Christ’s new resurrected life (Rom. 6:4–13; Col. 2:12–13; the Romans text is more careful about relegating actual resurrection to a future transformation of the body). In ancient usage the phrase “baptize into (*eis*)” carried a strong local sense (not just goal or purpose), whether literal (e.g. immersing oneself “into” a lake or sea as in Plutarch, *Brut. an.* 990E; *Superst.* 166A; or plunging a sword “into” one’s throat as in Josephus *J.W.* 2 §476) or figurative, referring to a state, condition, or sphere of influence into which one is transferred (e.g. sinking or being plunged “into” unconsciousness as in Josephus *Ant.* 10 §169; or being immersed into *porneia* or sexual immorality as in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.18). One might compare Mark 1:9: Jesus “was baptized *into* (*eis*) the Jordan by John” (but, differently, Acts 19:3: baptized *with reference to* [*eis*] John’s baptism”).

Given the easy transition from “into” in a literal-local sense to “into” in a figurative-local sense, it is not surprising to read of Paul moving easily from talking about being “baptized into Christ” to being “baptized into [viz., the controlling influence of] his death” and the collat-

eral image of being “buried with him through the (just mentioned) baptism into that death” (Rom. 6:3–4). Those who are joined to Christ by the Spirit are necessarily “joined” (in a looser sense) to his life history, including his death. An attachment to Christ is an attachment to the Christ who “was raised from the dead” (6:4) and who “died in relation to sin” (6:10–11) by leaving behind his former existence in the flesh where the threat of sin’s rule was an ever-present danger. Nor can the ad hoc phrase “baptized into Moses” (1 Cor. 10:2) be used to deny a local/incorporative sense since Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:1–5 is reading back Christian experience into Israel’s wilderness generation, the latter being only imperfect imprints of later realities of “the ends of the ages” (10:11). Incorporation into the covenantal dispensation marked by Moses’ leadership is analogous to, but imperfectly so, the believer’s real incorporation into Christ through reception of his Spirit.

198

“Baptized into the name of (*eis to onoma* + gen.) Lord Jesus” has been popularly misunderstood by English readers as an authorization formula – to baptize in Christ’s name, that is, on his behalf and with his authority and/or power – partly because of the commonplace (but erroneous) English translation “in the name of.” The phrase is rather an allegiance formula denoting the baptizand’s new identification with and ownership by the one named, owing to benefits received. Two background uses have been cited as relevant. First, *eis to onoma* + gen. pers. is common in Greek papyri recording banking sales, in the sense of “to the account [or: possession] of” someone (MM, *s.v. onoma* 5). Second, the Rabbinic expression *l’shem* is used broadly and vaguely in the sense “with reference to” (usually a thing) but with a wide range of nuances (e.g. with a view to, for the purpose of acquiring, in honor of, in allegiance to, etc.; Str-B 1.1054–55). The meaning of the phrase *eis to onoma* in the NT also varies widely: “in virtue of” (i.e. because that one is [a disciple]; Matt. 10:41–42); “with [someone] in view” (Matt. 18:20); “for the sake of” (Heb. 6:10); and, with “believe” as the verb, “in the one named” or “in the direction of” (John 1:12 and often). Our best clue as to its precise meaning when combined with the verb “baptize” is in 1 Corinthians 1:13–16 where “baptized into the name of” denotes the act of becoming the adherent of a particular

figure, with whom one now identifies and to whom one now belongs and pays allegiance (viz., Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ). Paul’s twin questions underscore this sense of allegiance based on indebtedness: “Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or into the name of Paul you were not baptized, were you?” (1:13; cf. 6:19–20: “you are not your own for you were bought with a price”). In short, the sense is “immersed/plunged into allegiance to.” This meaning makes good sense of the context in Acts 8:16 (where allegiance to Christ is contrasted with allegiance to the Samaritan magician Simon) and 19:5 (where disciples of John the Baptizer are contrasted with disciples of the one to whom John pointed, i.e. Jesus).

Similar phrases with different prepositions, *epi tōi onomati Iēsou Christou* (Acts 2:38) and *en tōi onomati Iēsou Christou* (Acts 10:48; cf. 1 Cor. 6:11), should probably be distinguished in meaning. In Acts 2:38 the sense is “be baptized each of you, (calling) *on (epi)* the name of Jesus Christ” (cf. 2:21; 22:16; also 9:14, 21). An authorization formula is unlikely, given the passive “be baptized,” while an allegiance formula is possible but less likely than the invocation formula suggested above. Acts 10:48 should be translated as “he ordered them *in (en)* the name of Jesus Christ to be baptized” rather than “he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (cf. 16:18). Here the phrase functions as an authorization formula but for the verb “ordered” rather than the verb “be baptized.” In 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul applies the phrase “in (*en*) the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” to three verbs: “you had yourselves washed off . . . you were sanctified . . . you were justified,” probably in the sense “through / by (calling on) the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” An authorization formula makes little sense here (“be sanctified” and “justified” on Jesus’ behalf or “with his authority and power?”), as does an allegiance formula. This is an instrumental variation of the invocation formula.

Matthew 28:19 is the only NT text that uses a Trinitarian baptismal formula: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into (*eis*) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Although it is presented in Matthew as a command of the risen Lord within a short interval after Jesus’ death, the single “. . . into the name of the Lord Jesus” is probably



the earlier formula (known by Paul already in the mid-50s). Even so, the Trinitarian formula became the main formula adopted by the church as early as within the second century. The Didache (c.100–120 CE, Syria?) knows both a single “the Lord” formula (9.5) and the fuller Trinitarian version (7.1, 3), with an apparent preference for the latter. As the context for Matthew 28:19 makes clear (28:17–18, 20), the Trinitarian formula was a way of ensconcing Jesus in the Godhead rather than a means to de-emphasizing Christology in favor of theology and pneumatology.

199

#### THE MODE OF WATER BAPTISM: IS IMMERSION REQUIRED?

That in the 1st century the normative mode of Christian water baptism was submersion is favored by many considerations. Submersion conveys well the sense of liquid as a controlling influence and fits well with one of the most common images for *baptizō*, namely, that of watery destruction through sinking or drowning. Paul could take it for granted that Christians in Rome, an assembly of believers that he had not yet visited, would understand the correlation of water baptism with death and burial (Rom. 6:3–4; Col. 2:12). This correlation favors submersion since submersion would be the normal means of undergoing a watery death and going under the surface of the water would convey underground burial (even burial chambers in Israel were normally cut out of bedrock underground). In ancient Israel ritual bathing for various impurities involved “one’s whole body” (Lev. 15:16). By Jesus’ day Palestinian Jews used stepped, plastered pools known as *mikva’oth* (sg. *mikveh*) for ritual full-body bathing. At Qumran, it was forbidden to bathe in water too shallow to cover completely the person (CD 10:10–13; so also later Rabbinic specifications for the size of *mikva’oth*: a minimum of 3 cu. high by 1 cu. wide by 1 cu. long; *b. Erub.* 4b). In *Sib. Or.* 4.165 (written c.80 CE by Jewish baptist circles) the command is given to “wash [*lousasthe*] your whole bodies in ever-flowing rivers.” The idea of full-body immersion is consistent with Tertullian’s citation of various locations where baptism might be conducted: “in the sea or in a pool, in a river or a fountain, in

a reservoir or a tub” (*On Baptism* 4). The only explicit indications in the NT regarding the place of baptism are to an outdoor body of water that required the one being baptized to go down into the water and come back up (Mark 1:5, 9–10 par.; John 3:22–23; “some water”: Acts 8:39). (For the mass baptism of 3,000 in Jerusalem reported in Acts 2:41 large outdoor *mikva’oth* around the temple may have been used.) While the Didache allows pouring water on the head if it is not possible to “baptize into” running water or “another water” (preferably cold water), it clearly distinguishes such pouring from the verb *baptizō* (7.1–3). Later, Cyprian (c.250) approved “divine abridgments” and “accommodations” to baptismal immersion in the form of sprinkling and pouring, but only in the extreme circumstance of a person confined to a sickbed and near death (*Ep.* 75). Both the *Epistle of Barnabas* (11.8, 11) and the “Shepherd of Hermas” (*Sim.* 9.16) in the first half of the 2nd century appear to assume the mode of immersion when they refer to “going down” into the water and “coming up” (similarly, Jewish proselyte baptism according to *b. Yebam.* 47b). In the 4th century John Chrysostom stated that the priest “puts your head down into the water three times and three times he lifts it up again” (*Catech.* 2.26), while Gregory of Nyssa compared the concealment of the body in the earth at burial to one’s concealment in water in baptism (PG 46.585B). Most baptismal fonts from the 3rd to 7th centuries are larger than would be needed for only a partial immersion, including the earliest font, at Dura-Europos (c.240).

However, another form of immersion in addition to submersion may also have been practiced early on. There is some evidence from the 3rd century on, coming from Christian art and the size of some relatively baptismal fonts, that at least some immersion was conducted by having the baptizand stand in a pool of water ranging from ankle-high to waist-high, with water then poured over the part of the body above water. Such an immersion would satisfy the meaning of *baptizō* (“drench” is a possible meaning, though not frequent) and illustrate well the biblical image of the Spirit being “poured out” from heaven. At the same time, the image of torrential downpours from the sky that can cause flooding does not preclude submersion, as the Flood story shows (cf. also the image in

Matt. 7:25, 27; Rev. 12:15). *Mikva'oth* also contained water poured down from the sky (rain water).

It is very difficult, however, to justify very partial applications of water such as pouring lightly over the head (light affusion) or sprinkling (aspersion), except under conditions where immersion is not possible. Such modes simply do not convey well the image of liquid as a controlling influence. The best argument for sprinkling is that one OT text (Ezek. 36:25–27) and a text at Qumran (1QS 4:21) link the cleansing of the Holy Spirit with sprinkling (for sprinkling as one mode of cleansing, cf. Num. 8:7; 19:13, 18–20; 1QS 3:9). However, this does not fit with the meaning of *baptizō* in the ancient world, nor with images of the Spirit and of burial in the NT.

#### DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PRACTICE OF WATER BAPTISM TO THE FIFTH CENTURY

Every mention of water baptism in Acts indicates that it is something done on the spot, immediately upon some concrete indication of faith in Christ: the 3,000 in Jerusalem (2:41); the Samaritans (8:12–13); the Ethiopian eunuch (8:36, 38); Paul (9:18; 22:16); Cornelius and his household (10:47–48); Lydia and her household (16:15); the Philippian jailer and all who were his (who were baptized “at once”; 16:33); “many of the Corinthians” (18:8); and the disciples of John the Baptizer (19:5). Basic repentance and acceptance of the gospel were the sole preconditions (though John the Baptizer demanded evidence of “fruits worthy of repentance” from some; Luke 3:7–9 par. Matt. 3:7–10). There was no probationary period of catechetical instruction prior to water baptism. Apart from the initial presentation of the core gospel, instruction was received *after* being baptized (2:42: after baptism the 3,000 were devoted to the apostles’ teaching). When the Ethiopian eunuch asked after hearing the core gospel, “What forbids me from being baptized?” (8:36), the implied answer was “Nothing” (except, of course, the need to believe in Christ, as some later mss. note with the addition of v. 37). Similarly, when Peter asked after witnessing Cornelius’s and his household’s response of faith to his preaching and their reception of the Spirit, “Can anyone forbid

water so as not to baptize these?” (10:47), the answer was obviously “No.” Water baptism took place even if – as in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, Paul, and the Philippian jailer – only one or two Christians were present to witness the baptism.

A handful of texts also mention the ritual of laying on of hands after water baptism for the purpose of imparting the Holy Spirit, though generally in exceptional circumstances (so the Samaritans who had not received the Spirit immediately after believing and being baptized, 8:15; and the disciples of John the Baptist who had received John’s baptism but not Christian Spirit-baptism, 19:6; cf. Ananias and Paul, 9:17; also 2 Tim. 1:6). As regards the Samaritans, prayer preceded or accompanied the laying on of hands (8:15; cf. Luke 11:13: God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him; Acts 1:14). It is possible, but not necessary, that the baptizer recited something like the formula of “I baptize you into the name of the Lord Jesus” and/or asked the candidate questions about Jesus; moreover, that the candidate made a verbal confession of Christ’s lordship (cf. Rom. 10:9–10). It is also possible, though we cannot be certain, that the candidate disrobed before entering the water and re-robed when coming out of the water, consistent, first, with later church practice and, second, with the NT baptismal metaphors of clothing oneself with Christ in Galatians 3:27 (cf. Rom. 13:14), of “the unclothing oneself of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ” in Colossians 2:11, and of “having unclothed oneself of one’s old human” and “clothed oneself with the new (human)” in Colossians 3:9–10 (cf. Eph. 4:22–24). Already the *Didache* (100–120) specified that the baptizand be instructed in the materials in chs. 1–6 and then fast “one or two days” before being baptized (a requirement, incidentally, that speaks against the supposition of infant baptism).

Through the 2nd to 4th centuries the rite of water baptism moved from a simple to complex rite that could involve up to three years of instruction prior to being baptized (the catechumenate), sometimes with a delay of baptism until a high holy day such as Easter or Pentecost. A more intense period of preparation could occur in the days or weeks leading up to the baptism, possibly including regular exorcisms, more rigorous questioning, fasting, and

all-night vigils. The baptism proper, which happened away from the whole assembly, could include: a prayer for the water; the candidate stripping completely and renouncing Satan just before entering the water; the candidate undergoing one or more anointings with oil poured down the head; the candidate being immersed in the water three times (each time before an immersion answering in the affirmative a question about belief in a member of the Trinity); and the candidate dressing in a white garment after coming out of the water. After the baptism proper, the baptizer (normally the bishop) might bring the newly baptized candidate before the main assembly, where he would receive the bishop's laying on of hands and prayer for the Holy Spirit, another anointing of the head, and a holy kiss. Finally, the initiated member might then be allowed to pray with the assembly, the kiss of peace could be exchanged, and the new member might then partake of the Eucharist. (So the 3rd–5th century compilation of earlier baptismal traditions traditionally identified as Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition*; cf. also: Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61, 65; Tertullian, *On Baptism*.) Ironically, the more complex the ritual became and the longer the delay following the initial profession of faith, the less effectual water baptism arguably was for bringing initial faith to full expression through symbolic reenactment.

Another significant development after the NT period was the rise of infant baptism (see below for the scriptural case). Some scholars argue (probably erroneously) that infant baptism is already inferred in Justin Martyr's reference to persons 60 or 70 years of age "who were disciples of Christ from childhood" (*First Apology* 15.6; Rome, c.150); in Polycarp's statement about having "served my King and Savior eighty-six years" (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 9.3; Smyrna, c.165); and/or in Irenaeus's description of infants being "reborn" and of Christ being "made an infant for infants and sanctifying infants" (*Against Heresies* 2.22.4; late 2nd century, Lyons, Gaul). The first *clear* reference to infant baptism appears in Tertullian's *On Baptism* 18 (c.200, North Africa) and there Tertullian counsels delay of baptism as "more suitable" on the grounds that very young children are not yet "competent to know Christ" and are innocent of culpable sin. The mention of infant baptism in the *Apostolic Tradition* ("baptize . . . small

children . . . not able to speak for themselves," 21.4) could be as early as the beginning of the 3rd century (if Hippolytus is the author; Rome) or as late as the 4th or 5th century. Origen (c.240, Caesarea) refers to "a tradition from the apostles to give baptism even to infants" as confirmation for the belief that even a baby's body is stained with sin (*Commentary on Romans* 5.9.11; cf. *Homilies on Luke* 14.5; *Homily on Leviticus* 8.3.5). Writing some 50 years after Tertullian, Cyprian and his fellow North African bishops ruled that infant baptism should not be necessarily delayed till the eighth day (on analogy with physical circumcision). They reasoned that, if baptism is not delayed for adults who become believers after a life of much sin, "how much less ought an infant to be held back" when "the sins remitted to it are not its own but those of another [i.e. Adam]?" (*Letters* 64 [58].5).

Despite such testimonies, infant baptism would not become standard practice until the 5th and 6th centuries. Christian inscriptions from the 3rd and 4th centuries indicate baptism of very young children only in circumstances where death was likely or imminent (discussed in Ferguson 2009, 372–77). So significant a set of 4th-century Christian leaders as Basil the Great and his brother Gregory of Nyssa were not baptized until adulthood despite coming from a family that had been Christian for generations. Eventually high childhood mortality rates, coupled with the view that baptism was objectively efficacious for bringing about salvation, made infant baptism the norm nearly everywhere.

In the 3rd to 4th centuries baptism was commonly deferred until after the sins of youth or even until just before death (Constantine is a notable example) in the belief that post-baptismal sins were not covered by baptism. The ascendancy of both infant baptism and penitential rites ultimately led to the demise of the delay-baptism movement. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) argued against delay on the grounds that baptism, far from posing a problem for post-baptismal sins, infused the believer with empowering grace to thwart sin even as it communicated the message that salvation was a work of God and not of humans. Another issue that caused some contention in the church in the 3rd and 4th centuries was whether to redo the baptisms of converts who had been baptized by

heretics. In the West, the laying on of hands sufficed for admission; but in some parts of the East (Asia Minor, North Africa) a rebaptism was required. The dispute became intense in the 250s between the Bishop of Rome, (Pope) Stephen I (254–57), and the African bishops led by the bishop of Carthage, Cyprian (248–58), with Stephen threatening excommunication of any who rebaptized. The controversy subsided with the deaths of Stephen and Cyprian and the persecution under Emperor Valerian. It resurfaced with the Donatists in the early 4th century and was settled by the Council of Arles in 314, which validated heretical baptisms done in the name of the Trinity.

202

#### BAPTISMAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MEDIEVAL, REFORMATION, AND MODERN ERAS

Scholastic thought (12th century on) made a distinction between baptism's effect in canceling punishment for original and actual sin (even restoring the baptizand to the innocence of the pre-Fall garden) and the ongoing effects of original sin in nature (e.g. lust, greed, death). Exorcisms and anointings (chrism) continued as component elements of the sacrament of baptism. Post-baptismal sins were dealt with by an intricate sacrament of penance. Drawing on Aristotelian thought, scholastics also distinguished between matter (water) and form (the trinitarian formula) in the sacrament of baptism.

The Reformers in the 16th century generally stressed certain aspects of baptism: the simplicity of the baptismal ritual (clearing away exorcisms and anointings); the efficacy not so much of the water as of the appropriation in faith and prayer of God's grace and Spirit; and the importance of securing from the parents a promise to enroll the child in regular catechetical instruction as the child grew older (at Geneva for those 10 to 12 years old, leading to a confirmation rite). They further stressed that baptism applied not only to past sins but also to all future sins so that rites of penance were no longer necessary for treating post-baptismal sins. The Reformers viewed the whole of Christian life as an unfolding of the promise already given in baptism.

Noteworthy among the Reformers, Martin Luther (1483–1546) integrated the doctrine of

justification by faith into a sacramental view of baptism, viewing baptism as a "means of grace" by which faith is created even in infants. This faith, in turn, made possible rebirth, forgiveness of sins, sanctification, and eternal salvation entirely as an act of grace. Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) rejected the idea that baptism as a rite effected salvation or was necessary for salvation. Instead baptism was a visible sign or symbol marking who was in the covenant community. Martin Bucer (1491–1551) stressed the importance of the communal context of baptism, setting the ritual within the regular worship service instead of a private family service.

Of special importance are the views of John Calvin (1509–1564) expressed in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, bk. 4, chs. 15–16. Calvin infused the doctrine of baptism with his theology of predestination by holding that baptism was efficacious only for the elect. Having in mind both Catholics and Anabaptists, Calvin contended that baptism was neither a cause of salvation nor merely a public profession of faith. It was rather the visible *assurance*, evidence, badge, and sign of God's invisible spiritual work that enabled believers to perceive the certainty and security of their salvation effected by Christ's blood (an assurance that, Calvin hastened to add, was only for those who were not complacent about sin). Against the Scholastics Calvin maintained that baptism did not restore one to the pre-Fall innocence of Adam. The sinful nature remained, though its dominion was removed. The bulk of Calvin's attention, however, was reserved for refuting the Anabaptists' opposition to infant baptism. Calvin made his stand primarily on the strength of a parallel between circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament, where the rite of circumcision, understood as "a seal of the righteousness of [Abraham's] faith," was likewise applied to infants.

Since the time of the early Reformation, Baptist theology has posed a serious challenge to the pedobaptist thought that has dominated most mainline denominations (Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anglican and Episcopalian, Methodist, and United Church of Christ, inter alia). This theology holds both that only those with conscious personal faith in Christ are to be baptized and that converts formerly baptized as infants should be rebaptized (or, more precisely, receive their first legitimate

baptism). From the 1520s on, various Anabaptist (“Rebaptizing”) groups began to emerge in continental Europe, most notably the Mennonites. In the early 17th century English Separatists sprouted various Baptist groups. Today Baptist theology and practice play a strong role particularly in evangelical denominations, including various groups that use the name Baptist, charismatic and Pentecostal groups, the Disciples of Christ, the Churches of Christ, Seventh-Day Adventists, and most “non-denominational” independent churches. The question of whether to baptize infants or not remains today the major point of difference as regards baptismal practice, though differences also exist in other matters within pedobaptist and believer-baptist circles. These other differences include: the degree to which (or whether) the water rite itself confers forgiveness of sins (on a spectrum from high-sacramental Catholic views to symbolic Baptist views); the specific mode of baptism (immersion, pouring, sprinkling); whether baptism alone qualifies persons for receiving communion or the additional rite of confirmation is required; and the extent of auxiliary ritual associated with baptism (on a spectrum from the extensive ritual of Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican communions to the more bare-bones approach of Reformed and Baptist churches).

203

#### THE QUESTION OF INFANT BAPTISM

The case for infant baptism in the NT is a difficult one. Proponents of infant baptism contend that NT references to baptizing households would probably have included, at least in some cases, very young children (Cornelius: Acts 10:24, 48; 11:14; Lydia: Acts 16:15; the Philippian jailer: Acts 16:31–33; Crispus: Acts 18:8; Stephanas: 1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15). The problem with this argument is that, as regards the four accounts that give some degree of detail about the circumstances of the household’s involvement, all suggest that each member of the household was of age to hear and respond to the gospel. As for Cornelius’ household, which consisted of “his relatives and old friends,” “the Holy Spirit fell upon *all* who were hearing the message,” with the result that “the circumcised believers heard them speaking in tongues and magnifying God” (Acts 10:24, 44, 46). In the case of the Philippian

jailer, Paul and Silas “spoke the word to [the Philippian] jailer and to *all* who were in his house” so that “he with his *whole* household rejoiced” (Acts 16:32, 34). Crispus “believed in the Lord, together with *all* his household” (i.e. all the members of his household also came to faith; Acts 18:8). Finally, Paul acknowledges that he baptized “the household of Stephanas” and later commends them because “the household of Stephanas have stationed themselves for service to the saints” (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15). In each instance activity is predicated of the members of the household that could not be predicated of infants.

To be sure, some scriptural passages give assurances to families. There are OT texts that prophesy a time when Yahweh “will circumcise your heart *and the heart of your ‘seed’* [i.e. descendants, offspring]” (Deut 30:6), give his people “one heart . . . so as to fear me all the days, for good for them *and for their children after them*” (Jer. 32:39), and “pour out my Spirit on all flesh” such that “*your sons and your daughters* will prophesy” (Joel 2:28). Moreover, Elijah *redivivus* will “turn . . . the hearts of the children to their parents” (Mal. 4:6). While these texts show God’s concern for the family, it is questionable whether NT appropriation of these texts encourages application to infant baptism. True, according to Acts 2:17–21, Peter cited Joel 2:28–32 in his Pentecost sermon and echoed the line about “your sons and daughters”: “The promise is for you *and for your children* and for all who are at a distance away” (2:39). Yet neither those “who are at a distance away” nor the male and female slaves cited from the Joel prophecy are exempt from Peter’s stated preconditions for receiving the promise: “*Repent and be baptized, each of you*” (2:38). Can infants unable to repent be included in the “each of you,” especially given the narrator’s follow-up remark that “*those who accepted his message* were baptized” (2:41)? As for heart-circumcision in Deut 30:6, Paul’s echo in Rom 2:28–29 is set in a context that subverts physical ties. Being a true Jew and having true circumcision, Paul argues, are things *not* “in the visible realm” but “in the hidden realm . . . of the heart, in the Spirit,” which he later explains comes through active faith in Christ. In tension with the assurance about children in Malachi 4:6 are Jesus’ repeated words about the priority of his call over family obligations and the

resulting division within families that such a call may create (Matt. 10:34–39 par. Luke 12:51–53, 14:26; Matt. 8:22 par. Luke 9:60; Mark 3:34–35; 6:4; 10:17–22 par.; Luke 11:27–28; John 2:4).

Several other key NT texts are put forward to defend infant baptism. (a) In 1 Corinthians 7:14 Paul calls “holy” a believer’s children even if the spouse is an unbeliever. However, Paul’s use of the term “holy” here cannot imply membership in the church through infant baptism since he also says that the unbelieving spouse “has been made holy through” the believing spouse. Paul’s point is merely that the presence of one believing parent renders the whole family serviceable to God’s use as a Christian family. Had Paul been referring to holiness that arises from infant baptism, he would not have said that “your children are unclean” if the unbelieving spouse has not “been made holy through” the believing spouse. (b) In the household code in Colossians 3:18–25 children are exhorted to “obey your parents in all respects, for this is pleasing in the Lord” (3:20; cf. Eph. 6:1). The wording suggests to some interpreters that Colossians 3:20 presumes all the children of a believer to be “in the Lord” through union with Christ in baptism. Yet the address to “wives,” “husbands,” “fathers,” and “slaves” does not presume that a believer’s spouse, parents, and servants will always be a Christian. The context indicates that only believers within each category are being addressed. Moreover, the kind of command given in Colossians 3:20 would make little sense if infants were in view since infants do not have the cognitive ability to respond to the command. (c) A key text cited in support of infant baptism is Jesus’ blessing of the “little children” (*paidia*, often denoting children up to the age of 7; Mark 10:13–16 par. Matt 19:13–15; Luke 18:15–17). Luke adds that “even infants (*brephoi*)” were included. The problem here is that a blessing is not a baptism. Moreover, both Jesus’ rationale for why “the little children” should not be “hindered” (“for to *such persons* the kingdom of God belongs”) and the adjoining warning (“whoever does not receive the kingdom of God *like* a little child shall certainly not enter into it”) suggest the symbolic value of Jesus’ action. Jesus was not speaking about children as such but rather children as an illustration or lesson for how adults must embrace the kingdom proclamation

with childlike trust, humility, and newness. This passage was rarely cited by patristic writers in support of infant baptism.

Essential to the scriptural case for infant baptism is the parallel made with circumcision as an entry rite for the newly born children of God’s people. Critical differences between the two covenants raise questions about how tightly the parallel can be drawn. Whereas in the Old Covenant membership in the people of Israel was a condition of birth and ethnicity, in the New Covenant membership in the church required spiritual rebirth and new creation. Colossians 2:11–12 does compare the stripping off of the fleshly body in baptism to circumcision but it is to a circumcision “not made by human hands” (implicitly, wrought by the Spirit) and ultimately attributable to the baptizand’s “faith in the working of God,” not physical paternity, ancestry, or ethnicity. Even in Romans 11 Paul states that the grafting back in of the “natural” Israel branches previously broken off was contingent upon unbelieving Israel not “continuing in unbelief” with respect to Jesus (v. 23). Physical descent from the patriarchs, while having a bearing on the exertion of God’s outreach (vv. 25–31), does not affect the requirements for salvation, which are the same for Jew and Gentile alike.

The main problem for proponents of infant baptism is that conscious faith in Jesus Christ is everywhere viewed in the NT as the main prerequisite for water baptism and the gift of the Spirit. The NT does not appear to support the view that faith in Christ is transferable (the quixotic “baptism for the dead” text notwithstanding). According to critics of infant baptism, viewing water baptism as a rite that can aid in securing the salvation of an infant *sans* any conscious appropriation of the gospel’s content grants water baptism a quasi-magical power that the authors of the NT never gave it. Supporters of infant baptism often counter that baptism is not primarily a visible expression of the baptizand’s faith but rather a visible expression of *God’s* grace and promise toward the baptizand that *calls* or *summons* the baptizand *to* faith. (But why refrain, then, from making God’s grace still more radical by assuring salvation for every individual, no matter how pernicious their belief and practice?) Some also suggest that God

somehow imparts sufficient faith or knowledge of salvation even to infants, in a manner as inexplicable as John the Baptist leaping in his mother Elizabeth's womb when Elizabeth met with Mary and was filled with the Spirit (Luke 1:41–44; cf. 1:15: "he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb").

One possible way of resolving disagreements between proponents of infant baptism and advocates of believers-only baptism is to start with an historical fact: namely, two millennia of divisions in the church over the issue. This longstanding split suggests that the church needs *both* a rite for parents to dedicate their lives to the nurture of their children in the Lord *and* a rite for persons who want to make a conscious dedication of their life to Christ. Some would reject this solution on the grounds that it violates the principle of "one baptism" in Ephesians 4:5. Yet no violation would arise if one understood a believer's baptism of immersion or drenching as the baptism to which the NT refers and treated as a proleptic or preliminary rite to real baptism a rite of light pouring or sprinkling of infants for parents who wanted to commit themselves publicly to raise the child in a godly manner. The rite of sprinkling or light pouring might aptly illustrate the parental hope for the full immersion of the child's life in Christ when he or she comes of spiritual age.

SEE ALSO: Children in Christianity; Exorcism; Great Commission; Limbo; Worship, Services and Settings

#### REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

- Aland, K. (1963). *Did the early church baptize infants?* London: SCM.
- Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1962). *Baptism in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1993). Baptism. In G. F. Hawthorne et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and his letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, pp. 60–65.
- Brook O'Donnell, M. (1999). Two opposing views on baptism with/by the Holy Spirit and of 1 Corinthians 12.13. In S. E. Porter & A. R. Cross (eds.), *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church*. JSNTSup 171. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, pp. 311–336.
- Brownson, J. V. (2007). *The promise of baptism: An introduction to baptism in Scripture and the Reformed tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Cross, F. L., & Livingstone, E. A. (1997). "Baptism" and "Infant baptism." *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian church*, 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 150–152, 831–32.
- Cullmann, O. (1950). *Baptism in the New Testament*. SBT 1/1. London: SCM Press.
- Dockery, D. S. (1992). Baptism. In J. B. Green et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, pp. 55–58.
- Dunn, J. D. G. (1970). *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Dunn, J. D. G. (1998). *The theology of Paul the apostle*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, pp. 442–459.
- Dunn, J. D. G. (1999). "Baptized" as metaphor. In S. E. Porter & A. R. Cross (eds.), *Baptism, the New Testament and the church*. JSNTSup 171. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, pp. 294–310.
- Ferguson, E. (1998). "Baptism" and "Baptistery." *Encyclopedia of early Christianity*, 2nd edn. New York: Garland, pp. 160–166.
- Ferguson, E. (2009). *Baptism in the early church: History, theology, and liturgy in the first five centuries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Hartman, L. (1973–1974). Into the name of Jesus. *NTS*, 20, 432–440.
- Hartman, L. (1992). Baptism. *Anchor Bible dictionary*, vol. 1. New York: Doubleday, pp. 583–594.
- Hartman, L. (1997). *Into the name of the Lord Jesus: Baptism in the early church*. London: T&T Clark.
- Jeremias, J. (1960). *Infant baptism in the first four centuries*. London: SCM Press.
- Jeremias, J. (1963). *The origins of infant baptism*. SHT 1. London: SCM Press.
- Marshall, I. H. (2002). The meaning of the verb "Baptize." In S. E. Porter & A. R. Cross (eds.), *Dimensions of baptism*. JSNTSup 234. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, pp. 8–24.
- Marshall, I. H. (2003). Baptism. In D. E. Gowan (ed.), *The Westminster theological wordbook of the Bible*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, pp. 29–33.

- Meeks, W. A. (2006). Social and ecclesial life of the earliest Christians. In M. M. Mitchell & F. M. Young (eds.), *The Cambridge history of Christianity*, vol. 1: *Origins to Constantine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 145–75, esp. 160–163.
- Oepke, A. (1964). [*baptō*, *baptizō*, etc.]. *Theological dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, vol. 1, pp. 29–546.
- Old, H. O. (2002). *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, pp. 7–22.
- Schnackenburg, R. (1964). *Baptism in the thought of St. Paul*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Schreiner, T. (2001). *Paul: Apostle of God's glory in Christ: A Pauline theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Wainwright, G. (1997). Baptism, baptismal rites. In R. P. Martin & P. H. Davids (eds.), *Dictionary of the later New Testament and its developments*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, pp. 112–125. 206
- Wright, D. F. (2005). *What has infant baptism done to baptism? An enquiry at the end of Christendom*. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- Wright, D. F. (2007). *Infant baptism in historical perspective: Collected studies*. Carlisle: Paternoster.