

*Ego Te Baptizo...*  
**The Church's Liturgy as Instrument of the Baptizing God**  
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*In Nomine Iesu*

**Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

A.D. 202. It is the chill gray hour before dawn in Rome. The first light of the new day is just beginning to show itself and the city's earliest risers are stirring. The dark streets are silent, yet seeping from one Roman house is the muffled sound of singing. Vendors making their way down to the forum in the early morning light pay no mind supposing it to be the end of someone's night of drunken revelry, but in fact it is the music of Christian hymns. Today is *Pascha*, the great festival of the Resurrection, and Christians are preparing for the reception of their Lord's newest sons and daughters by baptism. The doors to the house are locked against intrusion: what is going on inside is illegal according to Caesar's decree.

Arria,<sup>2</sup> a young Roman serving girl, stands in the *atrium* of the house with some other women. It is dark except for the light of one or two oil lamps. She shivers in part from the cold, in part from nervous anticipation. The three years of her instruction as a *catechumen* are over; she has passed the *scrutinies* and the rigors of the last few days of fasting and prayer as one of the *competentes*. Arria is about to be received into the family of Christ. Since the time of her enrollment she has been examined for her adherence to the moral expectations of the faith and taught the history of the gospel. She reflects on the time of her instruction—so long, and yet so short—and murmurs to herself practicing the words she has been taught to say. Ahead of her the children have already been baptized as have the male *competentes*.

Livia, a deaconess and also Arria's sponsor, approaches and takes her by the hand. She is guided across the dark courtyard to a door that leads to the baptistery of the house church. The door is opened for her and she steps inside. In the center of the room is a pool built originally to collect rainwater for the household, but used now to collect souls for Christ. The interior walls dance in the flickering lamplight revealing simple drawings of events she has learned by heart: Moses with his rod outstretched over the Red Sea; Noah and the ark; John baptizing the Lord Jesus at the Jordan. The stories are more than stories for Arria. She has been taught that her life is being rescued by and through water; soon she will be enclosed in the ark of the Church. She steps up to the coping of the pool and waits.

Livia assists her in disrobing and in removing the comb that holds up her hair so that Arria stands naked as at her first birth. Nothing of her former life will accompany her into the water. All is now ready. The presbyter of the congregation stands before her flanked on either side by a deacon holding anointing oil. Arria sets her jaw resolutely as the presbyter commands her to make her renunciation. "I renounce you, Satan, and all your service and all your works," she speaks in firm tones at his prompting.

Taking oil from the deacon on his left, the presbyter smears Arria with the oil of exorcism while saying, "Let all evil spirits depart far from you!"

Livia steps forward at the presbyter's signal and turns Arria to the East. At the presbyter's prompting she says, "I consent to you, O Father and Son and Holy Spirit, before whom all creation trembles and is moved.

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<sup>1</sup> The narrative that follows is based on the instructions for baptism given in the *Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus of Rome (170? – 253), XXI. The essayist gratefully acknowledges William Willimon, whose book *Remember Who You Are* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1980) provided the idea for the narrative.

<sup>2</sup> Arria shares the name of a Roman matron praised by Pliny the Younger for her compassion and courage. Pliny, *Letters* IV, 19.

Grant me to do all your wills [*sic*] without blame!” Livia then leads Arria down into the dark water of the pool and has her kneel. From the presbyter comes the question, “Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?”

“I believe,” Arria eagerly affirms. She feels Livia’s hand on her head gently but firmly pushing her down under the water. It is bracingly cold, but she rises without uttering a sound.

Arria hears the voice of the presbyter a second time. “Do you believe in Christ Jesus the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, who was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose the third day living from the dead, and ascended into the heavens, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?”

“I believe!” Livia’s hand again pushes Arria down into the watery tomb of the font.

“Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and in the holy Church and the resurrection of the flesh?”

“I believe!” For a third and final time Arria is plunged beneath the water and rises. She wipes the water from her eyes; this time it is mingled with tears of joy. The apostle’s words fill her with wonder: *You have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God*. Livia holds Arria’s arm and they step up out of the pool arm in arm. The presbyter takes oil from the deacon on his right, the oil of thanksgiving, and anoints her again. A sweet smell fills the room as he says, “I anoint you with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Arria then quickly dries and dresses. Another deacon leads her out of the baptistery and down a corridor to the *peristylum* of the house. The door at the end of the corridor is opened and Arria steps into a lamp-filled room where the congregation is waiting. She is led to the bishop who is seated at the far end of the room. She looks at him as she kneels. The bishop places his hand on her head and prays. He then anoints her with consecrated oil and seals her with the cross of her Savior on her forehead. “The Lord be with you,” he says.

“And with your spirit,” Arria responds.

The bishop kisses Arria on the forehead with the kiss of peace and presents her to the congregation. “Greet your new sister in Christ,” he invites. The family of the church surges forward in greeting. When all the newly baptized have been so sealed with oil and so greeted, the congregation gathers to celebrate the Supper of Christ. Forbidden before now from even witnessing the Supper, Arria trembles with awe and joy as she receives her first communion while the light of Easter morning fills the room.

“The bread of heaven in Christ Jesus.”

“Amen,” Arria whispers as she receives the body of Christ. Again, tears of joy well up in her eyes. Following the blood of Christ, Arria and the rest of the newly baptized also receive cups with water and milk mixed with honey symbolizing that they are cleansed; they are home.

All too soon for Arria the communion is over and the congregation begins to leave the house furtively and disperse into the city. Arria makes her way home in the young morning light, the bishop’s blessing still ringing in her ears. For Rome it is only a new day; for Arria, it is a new world.

Arria is the invention of an essayist living eighteen centuries after the time in which she is proposed to have lived, but her story reflects the literature from about A.D. 200 describing early Christian baptism in Rome, our earliest full description of the celebration of Holy Baptism. Lutheran pastors and people who celebrate the sacrament in A.D. 2002 will note striking differences between Arria’s baptismal experience and the rite celebrated in our churches, but also those aspects that bridge the centuries. The God-Who-Baptizes has continued to work through his church by this wonderful sacrament. The flow of history has changed the manner by which the Church celebrates baptism, but baptism has flowed like a strong steady stream to the present. Like other elements of the church’s life, this continuity in baptism testifies to the *Una Sancta*’s catholicity that transcends time and space. Baptism, the sacrament of initiation into the faith, remains at the center of the Church’s mission. It has always been true that “Christians are made, not born,” as Arria’s real-life contemporary Tertullian testified,<sup>3</sup> and the Spirit’s means *par excellance* of their making is Holy Baptism.

In this paper we will examine *how* the church has enabled the administration of the sacrament of Holy Baptism. We will survey the major developments of the Western rite, concentrating especially on how the first

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<sup>3</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* XVIII.

five centuries and other issues and events have shaped the practice of baptism. But we will also prayerfully grow in appreciation of our own baptism, especially how it connects us with the saints on earth and heaven of every time and place.

### **Baptism's Foundation: Ritual Sources and Celebration in the First Two Centuries**

Arria's baptism reflects how the third century church fulfilled the Lord's command, but the story of baptism begins well before. What can be identified from the New Testament and the earliest Christian writers about the practice of Holy Baptism?

The New Testament records the institution and command of Jesus to baptize, but neither prescribes nor describes explicitly the manner of celebrating baptism beyond the essential aspects of water being applied in the divine Name. Accounts of baptisms in Acts and references in the epistles emphasize the change effected in the life of the baptized and the meaning of baptism rather than how baptism was celebrated. Edmund Schlink notes:

The authors of the New Testament letters were not interested in the way, how, and by whom Baptism was administered, but they addressed the congregations on the basis of God's deed done to them in their Baptism... The New Testament statements rarely address themselves to a Baptism that is still to be performed.<sup>4</sup>

As a starting point, however, it is important to note that Jesus' command to baptize did not direct the early disciples to do something novel or unfamiliar. In addition to Old Testament ceremonial ablutions, various other ceremonial washings were well-known among the Jewish people. Mark 7:4 notes, "The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing" (βαπτίσωνται).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, since some of the disciples had received John's baptism in the Jordan and were possibly present at the Lord's baptism, they were experientially familiar with "whole-person" baptism for repentance. In addition, John 3:22 – 4:3 follows up the Nicodemus story (with its obvious baptismal overtones) with the information that Jesus' disciples were themselves baptizing others early in the Lord's earthly ministry. Familiarity with the concept of ceremonial washings of various types made detailed instruction about the essential actions unnecessary. Baptism accounts in the New Testament suggest that they were performed most often out-of-doors like John's in rivers or in pools (cf. Jn 3:23), although the mode of baptism cannot be determined.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus commanded Holy Baptism be conferred "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). However, in Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, and 19:5 baptism is "in the name of Jesus." Paul also speaks of the Corinthians as having been "washed (ἀπελούσασθε) ... in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). Although it may be possible that "in the name of Jesus" was a baptismal formula that was understood as functionally equivalent to the Trinitarian formula of Matthew 28:19, it is likely that the phrase refers to a profession of faith in Jesus as Savior that one gave before or while being baptized.<sup>7</sup> Romans 10:9 and 1 Timothy 6:12 may well be allusions to a confession of faith given at baptism.<sup>8</sup> As Arria's story illustrates, by the end of the second century in Rome, baptism was administered as the candidate answered

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, Herbert J.A. Bouman, trsl. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 172.

<sup>5</sup> See also Luke 11:38. The variant included in the NIV footnote to Mark 7:4 is useful in illustrating the modal ambiguity of βαπτίζω. "Wash" is a good translation in that the mode is determined by the context, not the word.

<sup>6</sup> Baptism is performed technically by means of *submersion*, *immersion*, or *affusion*. In submersion baptism, the person goes entirely under the water as in Orthodoxy and the Ambrosian rite. In immersion baptism, the greater part of the body is put under the water and water is poured over the remainder as is done in certain eastern churches. The term "immersion" is used imprecisely in some contexts for submersion. Affusion is the pouring or sprinkling of water over the baptismal candidate.

<sup>7</sup> Schlink, 174.

<sup>8</sup> This is the opinion of K.W. Noakes, "Initiation: From New Testament Times until St. Cyprian," *The Study of Liturgy*, Cheslyn Jones, et al., eds. (Oxford University Press, 1978), 86. Romans 10:9 says: That if you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 1 Timothy 6:12 says: Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

affirmatively the questions of the ministrant formed from the three articles of the nascent Apostles' Creed. The development of the late second century practice may support understanding "in the name of Jesus" confessionally rather than as a liturgical formula. New Testament baptism accounts make clear that instruction and preparation preceded the administration of baptism and that baptism was given to those in faith in Jesus.<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 6:1,2 may give some hint of what pre-baptism instructional content consisted of later in the apostolic age when it exhorts the reader to progress beyond "the elementary teachings about Christ...not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms (βαπτισμῶν), the laying of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment."

When we move beyond the first century we find Christian literature from the second century making numerous references to baptism and its effects, but descriptions of ritual action are limited to two witnesses, the *Didache* and Justin Martyr. The *Didache* is a curious tract purporting to be "the Lord's teaching to the heathen by the Twelve Apostles."<sup>10</sup> It contains two major sections: the "Two Ways," a moral catechism, and a section on church order. Current scholarship dates the tract well into the second century in Alexandria of Egypt. Justin Martyr (executed ca. 165) is the most notable of the second century Christian apologists. Born in Syria, he wrote his major works in Rome. Of particular interest is his *First Apology* (ca. 150) with its defense of Christianity, including baptism, to Emperor Antoninus Pius (136-161). Neither speak extensively about the manner of baptism's celebration. The *Didache* briefly instructs:

Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then baptize in running water, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Before the baptism, moreover, the one who baptizes and the one being baptized must fast, and any others who can. And you must tell the one being baptized to fast for one or two days beforehand.<sup>11</sup>

Justin is similarly brief:

...Those who are persuaded and believe that the things we teach and say are true, and promise that they can live accordingly, are instructed to pray and beseech God with fasting for the remission of their past sins, while we pray and fast along with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are reborn by the same manner of rebirth by which we ourselves were reborn; for they are then washed in the water in the name of God the Father and Master of all, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit... This washing is called illumination, since those who learn these things are illumined from within.

We, however, after thus washing the one who has been convinced and signified his assent, lead him to those who are called brethren, where they are assembled. Then bread and a cup of water and mixed wine are brought...<sup>12</sup>

While neither provides a full description of Christian initiation as practiced in their respective locales in the second century, both indicate three notable developments:

- Preparation for baptism was more formally organized by this time with fasting stipulated for both candidate and ministrant.

<sup>9</sup> The matter of infant baptism is treated later.

<sup>10</sup> *Didache* I, 1

<sup>11</sup> *Didache* VII, 1 – 4.

<sup>12</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology* I, 61, 65.

- An explicitly Trinitarian formula for baptism, either spoken by the ministrant (*Didache*), or assented to by the baptized as he was questioned (Justin) was firmly in place.
- Baptism was followed by celebration of the Eucharist. The *Didache* hints toward this practice in 9:5 and 10:6; it is explicit in Justin.

### Baptism's Ritual Structure: The Third Century

The near-total silence about baptismal practice in the first two centuries is broken when we move to the third century. The literature of this period presents the first comprehensive picture of how the early church celebrated the sacrament and established a template for subsequent centuries. Two sources are of particular importance: Tertullian's writings, particularly *De Baptismo* (ca. 200), and the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (ca. 215). Tertullian's work is a doctrinal treatise on the sacrament, but the rite for baptism as known to Tertullian may be distilled from it and from other of his writings especially *De Corona* and *De Resurrectione Carnis*. The *Apostolic Tradition* has a tortured history of transmission, but liturgical scholarship today generally views it as presenting an authentic view of Christian initiation in the late second-century Roman church.<sup>13</sup>

Before looking at particulars it is important to note four general developments regarding baptism that are in place by the time of Tertullian and Hippolytus:

- By this time baptism was normally reserved for celebration at *Pascha* (Easter) when the early church celebrated the entire "divine drama" which later spread over Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter.<sup>14</sup> However, in *De Baptismo*, Tertullian also stipulated Pentecost as "a most joyous space for conferring baptisms" and noted that "every day is the Lord's" so that baptism was conferred at other times.<sup>15</sup>
- Whereas it is impossible to state definitively who normally administered baptism in the first and second centuries (*cf.* 1 Co 1:17), by the time of Tertullian the administration of the sacrament was reserved for the bishop, and by episcopal permission, for presbyters and deacons.<sup>16</sup> As illustrated in Arria's story, the *Apostolic Tradition* stipulated the presbyter as the one who performed the central rite including the immediate pre- and post-baptismal anointings. Imposing hands and sealing with chrism afterward was the prerogative of the bishop.
- Infant baptism was explicitly discussed in the literature of the time. Tertullian advised against the practice in favor of delaying baptism to a later age<sup>17</sup> while the *Apostolic Tradition* instructed that on Easter little children (*infantes*) be baptized first followed by the men and women respectively.<sup>18</sup>
- The catechumenate was much more formally established.<sup>19</sup> The *Apostolic Tradition* noted that admission to the catechumenate was granted after an initial inquiry into the candidate's life and morals. Some candidates were rejected outright: panderers (πορνοσβοσκοί), actors (θεατρικοί), gladiators (μονομαχοί), magicians (μαγοί), and numerous others—all were banned unless the candidate separated himself from his former livelihood. Hippolytus

<sup>13</sup> See Lucien Deiss, *Early Sources of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1975), 31 – 34 for a brief history of the document and its discovery.

<sup>14</sup> The development of the sacred *Triduum* belongs to the fourth century. See Augustine, *Letter 55:24*; see also Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 156 – 159.

<sup>15</sup> Tertullian, *De Baptismo* XIX. This is in addition to so-called *clinical* baptism (from κλίνη) administered in an emergency to the terminally ill.

<sup>16</sup> Tertullian, *De Baptismo* XVII.

<sup>17</sup> Tertullian, *De Baptismo* XVIII.

<sup>18</sup> Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* XXI.

<sup>19</sup> Noakes, 91.

prescribed a three-year catechumenate with “[moral] formation rather than information as its thrust.”<sup>20</sup> Candidates who passed a final round of moral examinations (*scrutinies*) were admitted to the ranks of those making final preparation for baptism (the *competentes*).<sup>21</sup>

Against the backdrop of these general developments a specific pattern for baptism and ritual initiation into the faith emerges from Tertullian and Hippolytus with some variation between the two. This pattern consisted of three major parts—(1) Pre-baptism ritual; (2) Baptism; (3) Post-baptism ritual—each with its own elements. Since this order with its various parts is the foundation for subsequent development of initiation and the celebration of baptism in the West, it is worth looking at in some detail.

The rite was prefaced with the blessing of the font “at the hour when the cock crows.”<sup>22</sup> The need for secrecy, but especially the close association between the Resurrection “on the first day of the week, very early in the morning” (Lk 24:1) and the new life of the baptized did much to establish the desirability of Easter dawn as the prime time for baptism. “Baptism was practiced as a way of participating in Christ’s passover from death to life (Ro 6:3-5). The celebration of baptism in this paschal context made it a new type of exodus (and the exodus a type of baptism).”<sup>23</sup>

Lutherans are used to Luther’s instruction that “without God’s word the water is plain water” echoing the thought of Augustine’s famous epigram: *Accedat verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum*.<sup>24</sup> There was no such clear instruction in the third century in either Tertullian or Hippolytus. The *Apostolic Tradition* instructed ambiguously that the water be “prayed over.” Tertullian commented on the significance of this prayer: “all waters...in virtue of the pristine privilege of their origin, do, *after invocation of God*, attain the sacramental power of sanctification.”<sup>25</sup> It may have been that the prayer already was an *epiclesis*, an invocation of the Holy Spirit on the water, although it may also have been just a simple prayer asking God’s blessing.

## 1) Pre-baptism Ritual

As illustrated in Arria’s story, the baptism proper was conferred semi-privately away from the assembly and included a fairly elaborate preparation. The early church’s practice of baptizing men and women naked is jarring to modern Christian sensibilities, but Hippolytus instructed without comment: “[The *competentes*] shall put off their clothes. And they shall baptize the little children first....And next they shall baptize the grown men; and last the women, who shall have loosed their hair and laid aside [their] gold ornaments. Let no one go down to the water having any alien object with them.”<sup>26</sup> While disrobing facilitated anointing and immersing the candidate, it also strongly symbolized putting off the former life in keeping with the ancient preparatory rite’s emphasis on the rejection of sin and Satan as a precondition for baptism.<sup>27</sup> Renunciation of Satan: Tertullian and

<sup>20</sup> Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* XV, XVI, XVII, XX.

<sup>22</sup> Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* XXI.

<sup>23</sup> Senn, 91.

<sup>24</sup> “The word comes to the element and it becomes a sacrament.” Augustine, *Tractate 80*. Luther was especially appreciative of this epigram. It appears in the *Large Catechism* in connection with baptism, Part IV, 18 (*Triglot*, 737).

<sup>25</sup> Tertullian, *De Baptismo* IV.

<sup>26</sup> Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* XXI.

<sup>27</sup> Jewish proselyte baptism may have helped establish this practice along with others. Arising in the first century, B.C., proselyte baptism was a ceremonial washing applied to heathen converts to Judaism because they had not observed the ceremonial laws of purity in their pre-proselyte lives. But in addition to providing ritual cleansing, proselyte baptism was similar to John’s in that it came to denote forgiveness and new life. Keeping in mind some of the aspects of second century Christian baptism narrated above in Arria’s story, it is interesting to note that in proselyte baptism:

- Candidates were instructed and examined beforehand for legitimacy, a practice paralleling the example of pre-baptismal instruction in New Testament baptismal accounts and the development of the formal catechumenate of the early church.

Hippolytus both indicated a three-fold renunciation of “Satan, his pomp, and his works.”<sup>28</sup> This renunciation was paired with an act of “adhesion,” a declaration of commitment (“clinging”) to Christ spoken just before baptism. The twofold acts of renunciation and commitment formed a central part of the preparatory rite (later lavishly embellished) which reflected the fervor of the early church and its world view. As Pelikan notes, “The earliest Christology was not expressed in the cool identification of Jesus with the Logos as the rational principle of the universe, but in the fervid vision of the Son of man breaking the power of the demons and ushering in the new aeon with divine judgment and mercy. Baptism was a radical renunciation of the past and of this world[‘s prince].”<sup>29</sup>

The renunciation was followed by a first anointing. The liberal and frequent use of oil throughout the rite by the early church must be viewed against the cultural and religious context of the time. On the cultural level, almost every aspect of life in the Greco-Roman world—from the bathhouse to the temple—involved the use of oil, especially anointing or smearing with scented oil (χρῖσμα). Religiously, the Old Testament provided a rich background for ritual anointing through the history of the kings, priests, and prophets. While the crucial act in the initiation rite was plainly the “washing with water through the word,” for the ancient mind anointing was also naturally integral to the bath of baptism. “The reason reflects the bedrock Christian conviction that Jesus [is] the ‘Messiah’ or ‘Anointed One’ and that the Christian, as incorporated into Christ, is similarly an anointed one—a ‘christ.’”<sup>30</sup>

Differences in anointing at baptism revealed a point of divergence between Eastern and Western baptismal understanding. The Roman pattern used two anointings, one before baptism employing the oil of exorcism and one afterward using the scented oil of thanksgiving. The first anointing was of the whole body and was symbolic of purification from all the affections, standards, and allegiances of the former life for the strengthening of the neophyte in his combat with Satan. The second was also of the whole body and symbolized the gift of the Spirit. As illustrated in Arria’s story, the second anointing was done in two stages: the first stage occurred as she emerged from the water, the second after she had dried, dressed, and entered the church. The second stage included the imposition of hands by the bishop and signing the forehead with the cross using chrism, a practice later known as *consignation*. The first stage of this second anointing was eventually discarded in the West so that only the consignation was practiced.

The Eastern or Syrian pattern was to administer a two-stage anointing before baptism consisting of consignation on the forehead with oil followed by a complete anointing of the body. This anointing was understood, in typical Eastern lavishness, as symbolizing a range of things: protection, healing, exorcism, strengthening, but especially the “radiance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>31</sup> St. Ephraem Syrus (306 – 373) emphasized the Eastern understanding of the connection between the Spirit and chrism in his hymn:

*This oil is the dear friend of the Holy Spirit, it serves him, following him like a disciple.  
With it the Spirit signed priests and anointed kings; for with the oil the Holy Spirit imprints his mark on  
his sheep.*

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- Distinct from circumcision and like Holy Baptism, proselyte baptism was applied to males *and* females, as well as to their children. As in the baptism narrative above, in proselyte baptism both sexes were baptized naked as a sign of forsaking paganism while “two learned men” instructed them further in the law. In the case of women, the actual baptism was performed by a woman; the “learned men” taught the women from a distance.
  - A post-baptismal sacrifice was observed paralleling the place of the Eucharist in second century Christian baptism.

A discussion of the rise of proselyte baptism in the first century B.C. is given in Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, David Cairns, trsl. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 24 – 28.

See also R.T. Beckwith, “The Jewish Background to Christian Worship,” *The Study of Liturgy*, Cheslyn Jones, et al., eds. (Oxford University Press, 1978), 44 – 45.

<sup>28</sup> Tertullian, *De Corona* III; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* XXI.

<sup>29</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 123.

<sup>30</sup> Finn, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Finn, 20.

*Like a signet ring whose impression is left on wax, so the hidden seal of the Spirit imprinted by oil on the bodies of those who are anointed in baptism; thus they are marked in the baptismal mystery.*<sup>32</sup>

Finn notes that the importance of the disparate Syrian and Western patterns of anointing is twofold: “The Syrian emphasized the fact that baptism itself is the privileged moment of transformation through the descent of the Holy Spirit, while the Western focused attention on the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in baptismal rebirth and life after baptism.”<sup>33</sup>

Paired with the renunciation and following the anointing with the oil of exorcism was the adherence mentioned above. “I consent to you, O Father and Son and Holy Spirit...” Certain versions of the *Apostolic Tradition* included words for the adherence and directed that the candidate speak allegiance to Christ facing the East, although this aspect may have been added later than 200.<sup>34</sup> By the fourth century, however, this body movement was well-established and was elaborated by having the candidate speak the renunciation of Satan (*apotaxis*) facing West, then turning East (*syntaxis*) for the adherence. In some locales the candidate knelt for the *apotaxis-syntaxis*.<sup>35</sup>

## 2) Baptism

The central act of baptism was conferred using a profession of faith in answer to the creedal interrogation by the ministrant in conjunction with baptism by immersion or affusion. The baptism was administered by the presbyter assisted by a deacon who stood in the water with the candidate. As illustrated in Arria’s story, a deaconess assisted with women.<sup>36</sup> The profession of faith prescribed in Hippolytus reveals a developing form of the Apostles’ Creed. Arria’s story illustrates how the creed was cast in the form of three questions spoken by the presbyter to which the candidate responded, “I believe.” Hippolytus directed the deacon to baptize “having his hand laid upon [the candidate’s] head”<sup>37</sup> implying a preference for submersion; Tertullian commented with respect to the mode of baptism and the creedal expansion of Matthew 28:19 at baptism: “...we are thrice *immersed*, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the Gospel” (referring to Mt 28:19).<sup>38</sup>

## 3) Post-baptism Ritual

The post-baptism ritual, as noted above, began with a two-stage second anointing with the oil of thanksgiving administered by the presbyter. Following this anointing the neophytes dried, dressed, and were led damp and fragrant into the assembly before the bishop for the conclusion of their initiation. Hippolytus prescribed a laying on of hands followed by consignation with chrism (the completion of the second anointing). Tertullian ordered signing with the cross followed by the imposition. A prayer was spoken by the bishop asking for the gracious gifts of the Spirit for the neophytes; prayers by the faithful followed in which the neophytes joined with the assembly for the first time. The kiss of peace, a sign of fellowship and unity, was exchanged by the congregation and neophytes. The newly baptized then received their first communion during which they also received cups containing water and milk with honey. The cup of water symbolized the internal cleansing of

<sup>32</sup> St. Ephraem Syrus, “Hymn 7 on Virginity,” given in Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: West and East Syria* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 155.

<sup>33</sup> Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> See the critical edition of the *Apostolic Tradition*, Gregory Dix, Henry Chadwick, eds. (London: The Alban Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992), 35.

<sup>35</sup> Herman Wegman, *Christian Worship in East and West: A Study Guide to Liturgical History* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1985), 110.

<sup>36</sup> Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* XXI.

<sup>37</sup> Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* XXI.

<sup>38</sup> Tertullian, *De Corona* III.



the Eucharist. The cup of milk and honey symbolized the promised land of the Church to which the neophytes had now come.

Thus, the order left by the third century church for its full rite of Christian initiation included these broad elements:

- Formation via a three year catechumenate
- Ritual preparation for baptism
- Baptism by immersion or affusion
- Blessing and confirmation
- First communion

### **Excursus: Infant Baptism**

The early church's emphasis on moral and spiritual preparedness to enter the ranks of the *competentes* and receive baptism raises the question of when and why the church began baptizing infants and children who were "in the sphere of the church."<sup>39</sup> Since the rise of sixteenth century Anabaptism with its emphasis on "believer's baptism,"—the baptism only of those who can make a profession of faith before baptism (*i.e.*, adults)—the practice of "infant baptism" has been debated and the historical record scrutinized. Historical-critical scholarship early in the twentieth century weighed in on the matter (albeit for much different reasons than Anabaptism) and declared that the early church did not practice infant baptism.

It belongs to another essay to set forth the scriptural basis for baptism and the subjects of baptism. However, from the standpoint of *historical* evidence, it must be conceded that the first indisputable references to infant baptism only occur early in the third century. As noted above, Tertullian advised against the practice in favor of delaying baptism to a later age<sup>40</sup> while the *Apostolic Tradition* instructed that on Easter little children (*infantes*) be baptized first.<sup>41</sup> Clear, incontrovertible references prior to ca. 200 have never been found. Rather, evidence that infant baptism was administered prior to this is dependent on assumptions and reasoning done on the basis of nuances of Greek vocables, tomb inscriptions, and martyrdom stories.<sup>42</sup>

But the nature of Tertullian's remark and the assumptions behind Hippolytus' directive certainly point to a practice that must have been in place in their respective locales (North Africa and Rome) well before each man wrote. It would be absurd to suggest the practice was an innovation to either: Tertullian did not object to infant baptism on theological grounds, and Hippolytus is plainly speaking to an established practice. Schlink notes with respect to Tertullian:

His opposition seems rather to foretell an ethical rigorism which subsequently led Tertullian into Montanism. He understood baptism not as an aid in the battle against temptations but rather as a 'heavy

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<sup>39</sup> It is important to frame what is generally called "infant baptism" in this way. As Edmund Schlink points out, "The term 'infant Baptism' is imprecise and subject to misunderstanding for the church does not baptize all children. As a rule the concern is with the children of baptized parents who bring them to Baptism and also the children of unbaptized parents who desire Baptism for themselves and their children, and occasionally orphaned children who are adopted and reared by Christians. In all these cases we are therefore dealing with children as will grow up within the sphere of the church. Hence, infant Baptism does not mean the Baptism of children in any case, but of such children as have already been born within the sphere of the church." Schlink, 130.

<sup>40</sup> Tertullian, *De Baptismo* XVIII.

<sup>41</sup> Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* XXI.

<sup>42</sup> A comprehensive survey of this evidence was made by Joachim Jeremias in his study, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), but Jeremias' assessment of the evidence was effectively tested and found lacking by Kurt Aland's response, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963). Jeremias responded to Aland in another monograph, *The Origins of Infant Baptism* (Napierville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1963). Among the "nuances...and martyrdoms" discussed by Jeremias and Aland is the so-called οἶκος *formula* used in Acts 16:31, the martyrdom of Polycarp, and early Christian tomb inscriptions. Sacramentally-minded Christians will find Jeremias' presentation compelling.

burden.’ It is important to note that in spite of all his criticism, Tertullian in no way contested the validity of the baptism of infants; he merely regarded postponement as “more beneficial.”<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, the lack of debate about the theological legitimacy of infant baptism both before and after 200 strongly suggests that infant baptism had always been common place and accepted. Voices other than Tertullian’s could be heard from time to time questioning the desirability of baptizing infants because of moral concerns about their post-baptismal lives—delaying baptism until late in life for this reason created a “crisis in infant baptism”<sup>44</sup> in the fourth century<sup>45</sup>—but criticism of infant baptism in principle and the subsequent demand to rebaptize arose first from the sixteenth century Anabaptists.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, Origen spoke (ca. 240) of infant baptism as a tradition “received from the apostles”<sup>47</sup> and Irenaeus (ca. 180) of how Jesus “came to save all, I say, who through him are born again [*renasci*] to God—infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men.”<sup>48</sup> While such *a posteriori* support for infant baptism’s early appearance in the church’s life cannot claim to be conclusive, its consistency with the point under consideration is impressive.

In the final analysis, infant baptism is essentially a theological issue in terms of both its origin and legitimacy. Even if it could be established whether the church of the first two centuries did or did not baptize infants on the basis of historical data, this would neither legitimize nor hereticize the practice. A lack of robust confession of the practice, if not for the reason of being uncontroversial, would prove nothing but the infancy of the primitive church’s understanding of Scripture’s doctrine in much the same manner (and timing) as the early church was developing in its confession of the Trinity or Christology. In Scripture, Holy Baptism’s emphasis is not on “my reason or strength,” but on God’s grace and will. Schlink provides an apt summary statement of the issue with respect to the early church and infant baptism:

The fact that infant Baptism established itself so self-evidently in the ancient church, that it was felt so little as a problem, and that according to the sources it was never rejected in principle, that is, was never regarded as invalid and needing repetition, rests in the first instance on the certainty that God is graciously active in Baptism. There was no thought of the exceptional case of a heretical baptism or of a deceitful reception of Baptism, but the concern was one of faith in the saving activity of God through baptism on behalf of man in need of grace. People thought differently about the innocence and sin of children and therefore also about their being subject to judgment, and no clear distinctions were as yet made between man’s sinful nature and his sinful decisions. Yet even before the doctrine of original sin was formulated, and at the same time as thoughts of the innocence of infants were entertained, there was present a perception of the child’s weakness and poverty, as well as of the temptations and dangers that would beset the growing child. In short, there was a realization that the child had to depend on the grace of God.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Schlink, 133.

<sup>44</sup> Jeremias, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?*, 87ff.

<sup>45</sup> See St. Augustine’s criticism of his own delayed baptism, *Confessions* I, 11: “To what end was my baptism deferred? Was it for my good that I was left to sin with a loose rein...? Why do we constantly hear such phrases as: ‘Let him alone, let him keep on with what he is doing, he is not baptized?’” Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, F.J. Sheed, trsl. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943).

<sup>46</sup> Although they predate the Anabaptists, the Albigensians rejected water baptism *in toto* and the donatistic Waldensians the validity of Roman Catholic baptism. Neither took aim at infant baptism *per se*.

<sup>47</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* V, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* II, 22. *Renasci* is strongly evocative of baptism in view of John 3:3-7 where it is used in the Vulgate to translate γεννηθήναι ἀνόθεν.

<sup>49</sup> Schlink, 142 – 143.

## From the Fourth Century to the Reformation

Up until the Edict of Milan (312), Christianity's unfavorable image in the upper circles of the state and its illegal status had encouraged the clandestine celebration of baptism and helped mold the rites of the early church. But the political upheavals of the Roman world in the early fourth century resulted in the persecuted church becoming the tolerated church, and soon after, the ascendant legal religion of the Roman Empire. Such a shift in status had profound effects in every aspect of the church's life, including the celebration of baptism. In general terms, as the church began to enjoy growing prestige and power, Christian worship became more ornate and formal. The furtive house church was replaced by the basilica and *ad hoc* fonts by formal baptisteries constructed exclusively for the administration of the sacrament.

In the fourth and fifth centuries different locales used their own variation of the general order of initiation and baptism while practicing and interpreting various ceremonies differently, but there remained an overall sameness everywhere. Three areas are important to seeing the development of initiation and baptism in these centuries: 1) admission to the catechumenate; 2) enrollment and preparation for baptism; 3) the actual rites of initiation.

### 1) Admission to the catechumenate

With the influx of larger numbers of adults, the older more rigorous practices of the catechumenate became harder to maintain. Moreover, during this century, the trend or tendency to delay baptism until later in life (as Constantine had) created a class of individuals who were associated with the church, but not in full communion with her. Under these pressures, admission to the catechumenate changed from being primarily postulancy for baptism to a form of "associate membership" in the church.

The rite for admission to the catechumenate reflected this shift. First, the sign of the cross was imposed on the forehead. Second, salt representing "healing, preservation, and the seasoning of wisdom"<sup>50</sup> was placed on the tongue. Third, a laying on of hands in blessing was imparted. Fourth, an exorcism was performed. Signing with the cross and receiving salt were repeated at various times after admission to the catechumenate.<sup>51</sup>

### 2) Enrollment and preparation for baptism

Preparation for baptism combined third century enrollment practices with elements formerly performed only when a catechumen entered the ranks of the *competentes* just before baptism. Now those who desired baptism were enrolled by name forty days before baptism (nascent Lent), which was still celebrated predominantly at Easter in most locations.<sup>52</sup> In the ceremony (ὄνοματὰ γράφια), sponsors enrolled their candidate's name and certified their readiness before the bishop.<sup>53</sup> In Rome, the moral examination of the

<sup>50</sup> E.J. Yarnold, "The Fourth and Fifth Centuries," *The Study of Liturgy*, Cheslyn Jones, et al., eds. (Oxford University Press, 1979), 96.

<sup>51</sup> E.J. Yarnold suggests that the salt may have been a substitute for the Eucharist which the catechumens were still not permitted to witness. Yarnold, 96.

<sup>52</sup> Although somewhat tangential to this essay, it is important to note that the season of Lent developed in conjunction with the preparation of the *competentes* for baptism. Originally, Lent was preeminently a "baptismal season." In keeping with this, the restoration and rehabilitation of the ancient *Triduum* services within Lutheranism (Maundy Thursday: Stripping of the Altar, Good Friday: Adoration of the Cross, Holy Saturday: the Great Vigil)—especially that of the Easter Vigil—help restore this baptismal emphasis to Lent. In particular, while Lenten midweek services properly continue to focus on the sacrifice and passion of Christ, the Propers of the Sundays in Lent emphasize baptismal renewal in anticipation of and preparation for the celebration of Holy Baptism in the Vigil. The Christian's "Romans 6" connection with Christ's death and resurrection by baptism is thus powerfully reinforced during Lent and "Baptism: Fourthly" in the catechism is wonderfully promoted. *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*, the "new agenda book" updating the *Lutheran Agenda*, contains evangelical Lutheran forms of the *Triduum* services and explanations about this renewed baptismal emphasis in Lent.

<sup>53</sup> The *competentes* were also called the "chosen" (*electi*) and those "destined for illumination" (φωτιζόμενοι, *illuminandi*).

*competentes* was repeated in a formal “scrutiny” three times during the forty days.<sup>54</sup> Each scrutiny ended with an exorcism including *exsufflation*, or blowing on the eyes.

Daily instruction during the forty days was expected. Candidates spent the first half (roughly) of the period in lessons on Scripture with the emphasis on moral lessons illustrated from the Old Testament. In Rome, the second half was spent in instruction in the creed. The instruction went forward in three stages: *traditio*, *explanatio*, *redditio symboli*. In the first, the creed, which the candidates had never heard, was “handed over” (*traditio*) phrase by phrase and committed to memory. In the second, the meaning of the various phrases was elucidated for the purpose of the candidate learning to repeat the meaning (*explanatio*). In the third, the candidate was examined for ability to repeat the creed and answer questions about its meaning (*redditio*). In some locations, the Lord’s Prayer was similarly parceled out and learned by the candidates.<sup>55</sup>

As early as the second century, preparation for baptism included the discipline of fasting during the days immediately preceding baptism. By the fourth century, this had expanded to coincide with the forty days of preparation. “In some places the fast applied not only to food, but also to the legitimate use of marriage [and] the pleasure of the bath...”<sup>56</sup> A bath to make one decent for the bath of baptism was permitted the *competentes* on Maundy Thursday!

### 3) The rites of initiation

A comprehensive survey of the rites of initiation throughout the church of this time is impractical for our purposes: orders varied and no single location did all the ceremonies that can be documented.<sup>57</sup> The order of the third century remained the basic structure and certain common patterns of ritual action were widely followed.

The pre-baptism ritual continued to focus on renunciation, exorcism, and adherence, but just getting through the door of the baptistery had now become a rite in itself. An “opening ceremony” (*apertio*) was performed in which the bishop touched the candidate’s eyes, ears, and nose and spoke Jesus’ word of command from Mark 7:34: *Effeta!* (ἔφφαθα). According to Ambrose of Milan (340 – 397), this was done “in order that you may receive the good odor of eternal piety...just as the holy Apostle said.”<sup>58</sup> Upon completion of the *apertio* the door to the baptistery was opened to the candidate.

The functional act of disrobing became ceremonially embellished with words recalling Christ’s entry and exit from life naked, the discarding of the Old Adam, and the return of the candidate to original innocence.<sup>59</sup> The first anointing, called the “oil of exorcism” by Hippolytus, had lost its explicit connection to exorcism and was now viewed as preparation for warring against Satan. Mystagogy of the fourth and fifth centuries wove

<sup>54</sup> Yarnold, 97.

<sup>55</sup> Finn, 58.

<sup>56</sup> Yarnold, 99.

<sup>57</sup> See Hugh M. Riley, *Christian Initiation: A Comparative Study of the Interpretation of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Mystagogical Writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Ambrose of Milan* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1974), for a detailed exposition and comparison of the rite of initiation in fourth century Jerusalem (St. Cyril), Antioch (St. John Chrysostom), Syria (Theodore of Mopsuestia) and northern Italy (St. Ambrose).

<sup>58</sup> Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* I, 3.

<sup>59</sup> See Riley, 159 – 189. Fourth and fifth century mystagogical preaching taught the significance and symbolism of the removal of clothing and nakedness in terms of three dimensions. First, the mystagogues pointed to a moralistic dimension which symbolically equated the removal of clothing with the removal of the old Adam and his deeds. Second, they pointed to a “mortality-immortality” dimension which associated the removal of the garment prior to baptism as a sign of insertion of the *neophyte* (as the newly baptized were named) into the history of salvation. In this regard, much was made of the neophyte’s connection by baptism with Christ’s victory on the cross—a victory, the preachers reminded, won by the Savior after undergoing the shame of being stripped. Identity with Christ was a paramount issue of the mystagogues’ understanding of initiation so that the shame of nakedness was changed into honor by its association with Christ’s humiliation on the cross. Third, they pointed to a return to primeval innocence via baptism so that the stripping of the candidate’s garments and his (her) subsequent nakedness, far from an impoverishment or embarrassment, was symbolic of returning to the innocence and intimate trust in God experienced in Eden when Adam and Eve “were both naked and felt no shame” (Gen 2:25).

rich verbal tapestries about the symbolism of this anointing, comparing it to the preparation of an athlete for a contest and sharing with Christ, “the true olive.”<sup>60</sup>

The renunciation of Satan and adhesion to Christ were similarly elaborated. In western locations, the renunciation was made in response to a question; in the East it remained a statement by the candidate.<sup>61</sup> The list of Satan’s followers was expanded in some locations to include “all his angels, all his works, all his service, all his vanity, and all his worldly enticements.”<sup>62</sup> Most areas included the practice of facing West for the *apotaxis* and turning to the East for the *syntaxis*. Like the renunciation, the adhesion was given either in answer to a question or as a statement dependent upon local custom. Local variations also folded kneelings and bowings into the ceremony.

The baptismal water was also formally consecrated as part of the initiation rite. There was an exorcism spoken over the font coupled with an *epiclesis* by which the power of God was called down on the water: “...the form and practice of baptism includes this: that the font be consecrated first, then that he descend who is to be baptized. For, when the priest first enters, he performs the exorcism according to the creation of water; afterwards he delivers an invocation and prayer, that the font may be sanctified and that the presence of the eternal Trinity may be at hand.”<sup>63</sup> The sign of the cross was made by hand over the water or by oil poured into it.

Fonts were specially constructed for baptism with sizeable pools large enough to permit easy submersion in some cases.<sup>64</sup> Inlets under which the candidate stood at the proper time facilitated affusion—the pouring of copious amounts of water over the head—in others. The West continued to baptize according to the question-answer manner; the East used the passive formula, “N— is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>65</sup>

Baptism was followed by a second anointing as in the third century, sometimes in the form of a cross. In the East, this anointing was often done with consecrated *myron* (μύρον), an olive oil base to which balsam and other aromatics were added,<sup>66</sup> which was considered in some locations to bestow the Spirit.<sup>67</sup> The language surrounding the use of *myron* and the gift of the Spirit can be somewhat misleading. Anointing with *myron* was looked upon as an integral part of baptism and not as a separate or post-baptismal part of the rite: “baptism” meant in this context the application of water *and* anointing with *myron*, although it was conceded “If there be neither oil nor *myron*, the water is sufficient.”<sup>68</sup> In the West the “sealing by the Spirit” under the bishop’s anointing came to be separated from baptism as confirmation took shape ritually and later theologically.

In the fourth and fifth centuries various additions conflated the third century post-baptismal rites. In many locations East and West the candidates’ feet were washed upon exiting the font by the bishop or clergy. Ambrose saw in the practice not humility but protection, and offers this commentary on the practice:

You came up from the font. What followed? You heard the reading [Jn 13]. The girded priest...washed your feet. What mystery is this?...The mystery is also sanctification: ‘If I wash not thy feet, thou shalt have no part with me.’... The Lord answered [Peter], because he had said

<sup>60</sup> Riley, 199. The force of the olive metaphor was in likening Christ to the importance of the olive for life and light in ancient Mediterranean culture.

<sup>61</sup> Yarnold, 101.

<sup>62</sup> Ambrose, *De Sacramentis*, I, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Ambrose, *De Sacramentis*, I, 18.

<sup>64</sup> The Lateran baptistery in Rome dates back to the fourth century. Its font was 10 meters across with water entering from seven silver deer heads. By the early fifth century, 25 smaller churches (*tituli*) were built in different locations in Rome to accommodate the number of baptisms. Less spectacular than the Lateran, they included baptisteries housed in circular or octagonal buildings with pools 2 – 4 meters across and usually 1 meter deep with water constantly flowing in and out of the font. Views of early fonts are available at: <http://spazioinwind.iol.it/lucina/fonts.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> Yarnold, 103.

<sup>66</sup> Riley, 370.

<sup>67</sup> Riley, 363ff; Yarnold, 105 – 106.

<sup>68</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* VII, 22.

‘hands and head’: ‘He that is washed, needeth not to wash again, but to wash his feet alone. ‘ Why this? Because in baptism all fault is washed away. So fault withdraws. But since Adam was overthrown by the Devil, and venom was poured out at his feet, accordingly you wash the feet, that in this part, in which the serpent lay in wait, greater aid of sanctification may be added, so that afterwards he cannot overthrow you.<sup>69</sup>

Following this, the *neophytes* (as the newly baptized were named) were clothed in white symbolizing innocence. In the fifth century, they would wear white throughout the week following baptism. In keeping with their new status as one of the *illuminati* the neophytes were given a lighted candle to carry as well. Initiation continued to culminate with the neophytes being brought into the assembly and attending their first communion. The custom of distributing cups of milk and honey to the newly baptized continued into the sixth century in the West.<sup>70</sup>

### Decline of the Ancient Initiation Rite

The rites of initiation were developed with adult candidates primarily in mind, but by the sixth century in the West infant baptisms had become the general rule.<sup>71</sup> During the third and fourth centuries, children and infants had been baptized along with their parents; how the church carried out the baptism of infants born to Christian parents in the fourth and fifth centuries is not clear.<sup>72</sup> What is clear is that as infant baptisms increased, initiation as it had been developed for an adult catechumenate continued to be used in its broad outline with infants. Not surprisingly, the patristic initiation rite lost much of the integrity of its order as a result of the incongruity of the situation.

The effectual loss of the adult catechumenate marked the first step in this decline. As infants filled the catechumenate the rather absurd situation pertained of maintaining the practices developed for adult catechumens with infants. The scrutinies and other Lenten catechumenal practices were removed from the congregation over time in recognition of the absurdity: there was not much point in the having the faithful witness such things.<sup>73</sup> This fostered the privatization of baptism so characteristic of the medieval church as the sacrament disappeared from corporate parish worship life.<sup>74</sup>

A second factor in this process of loss of integrity was the establishment of confirmation as a separate “sacrament.” Between 500 and 800 in Rome and the West, Easter remained the primary day for the bishop to administer the sacrament, but high infant mortality rates and a maturing view of the doctrine and implications of original sin led to the practice (well-entrenched by the tenth century) of individual baptism of infants by the local priest soon after birth. A sick child so baptized who recovered was taken later to the bishop for “confirmation,” that is, to complete the post-baptismal sealing by the Spirit that was part of the patristic rite. In time, and especially in the large trans-Alpine dioceses, it often took bishops years after a child was baptized to complete this final anointing. But since the bishops maintained “sealing with the Spirit” as their prerogative, separation of confirmation from baptism became the norm.<sup>75</sup> In time, the now-separate act of Confirmation came to be regarded as a sacrament in its own right (rite?) and was construed as an “added gift of grace” to help the baptized war against the world, devil, and flesh.

A third issue leading to the disintegration of the ancient initiation rite in the medieval West was the separation of baptism and first communion. Sixth century practice, according to the *Ordo Romanus XI*, directed

<sup>69</sup> Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* III, 4 – 7.

<sup>70</sup> Yarnold, 106.

<sup>71</sup> Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship: Lutheran Liturgy in its Ecumenical Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 31.

<sup>72</sup> However, see Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, ch. 2, for a discussion.

<sup>73</sup> Pfatteicher, 32.

<sup>74</sup> *Christian Worship's* rite is constructed to accommodate the significant shift *back* to congregational celebration in the twentieth century. See p. 25.

<sup>75</sup> Senn, 194.

after baptism and confirmation by the bishop that “all the infants receive communion”<sup>76</sup> thus preserving the patristic rite’s connection of first communion with baptism. But, due to growing scruples regarding the legitimacy of infant communion in the twelfth century,<sup>77</sup> over time infants were communed only under the wine, and with the withdrawal of the chalice from the laity ca. 1200, infant communion disappeared in the West.<sup>78</sup> The Council of Lambeth’s (1281) decree that *no* unconfirmed person be permitted to receive the Supper completed the severance so that first communion was no longer part of initiation..

By the eve of the Reformation, the patristic rite survived only on a superficial level. By regulation, baptism was to be administered within a week after birth. The catechumenate survived only in vestigial form through the perfunctory performance of the “church porch” rites: the *Effeta*, the exorcisms, the delivery of the creed (*redditio symboli*), and the Lord’s Prayer (all spoken by the sponsors), etc. In popular piety the naming of the child tended to overshadow the sacrament in significance<sup>79</sup> and since the rite was celebrated privately on an “as needed” basis, the congregation consisted only of the priest, the candidate, the parents and sponsors, and an acolyte.

### Luther’s Reforms

Up until this point we have concentrated on tracing the development of baptism’s celebration without offering much by way of theological critique. From a purely developmental view of ritual, by the sixteenth century the celebration of baptism could be likened to a Renaissance painting that had received so much “touching up” over the years and so many layers of lacquer that the original had become greatly obscured. Baptism *proprie*, as it was embedded in the more comprehensive practices of initiation, had been cloaked under more and more ceremonial that was less and less understood. And, although the shape of Christian initiation reflected its patristic heritage, the integrity of its shape had been lost. However, a loss of *theological* integrity had begun much earlier as so much of the initiation rites came to be viewed as a process for qualifying the candidate for baptism. The actions which preceded and followed baptism came to be regarded as means of God’s saving work in themselves, their sequence and performance as validating or completing the sacrament. Norman Nagel observes, “[These things] suggest the question of how much is enough, and with that the danger of quantification and anthropocentricity... Improvements in man [became] the way to Baptism, as if some level of cleanness or purification was a necessary preliminary or qualification for Baptism, as if God loved us because we are lovable.”<sup>80</sup>

But with the rediscovery of the gospel in the Lutheran Reformation came a renewed understanding and appreciation of the sacraments as true means of God’s grace by virtue of their divine institution and promise. Early in the course of the Reformation Luther penned *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism* (1519),<sup>81</sup> which extolled the sacrament as God’s mercy and work, and in the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) he asserted that baptism was effective by virtue of the word of promise connected to it rather than the form and order of the initiation rite.<sup>82</sup> In 1523 (the same year as the *Formula Missae*) he undertook initial liturgical reform of the sacrament by issuing *Das tauff buchlin verdeutscht*.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Pfatteicher, 61.

<sup>77</sup> Senn, 227. Senn notes especially the controversy over the Real Presence by Berengar (1010-1088) as the catalyst for these “scruples.”

<sup>78</sup> Pfatteicher, 61.

<sup>79</sup> Fisher, 116.

<sup>80</sup> Norman Nagel, “Holy Baptism,” *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, Fred L. Precht, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), 270, 273.

<sup>81</sup> See *Luther’s Works*, American Edition [AE], 35:29 – 43.

<sup>82</sup> See AE 36:57 – 81, especially p. 63 where Luther asserts, “Baptism truly saves in whatever way it is administered, if only it is administered...in the name of the Lord.”

<sup>83</sup> See AE 53:96-103.

The 1523 rite reflected the Reformer's pastorally motivated conservative approach to liturgical change. Luther rendered the medieval Roman rite intact into German with two exceptions.<sup>84</sup> He inserted the reading of Mark 10:13-16, the so-called "children's gospel," as a reading to underscore Jesus' love and concern for children in baptism, and he replaced the traditional collect spoken after the giving of salt with his celebrated *Sintflutgebet* (Appendix). This prayer, perhaps one of the finest liturgical pieces composed by Luther, draws upon Old Testament references which foreshadow baptism, especially the Flood, the ark, and the crossing of the Red Sea. Nagel notes, "The *Sintflutgebet*...gathers a number of things together that are not original with Luther, although the combination of them may well be. The matrix of this prayer are the blessing of the water and the readings contained in the Easter Vigil."<sup>85</sup>

In outline, the 1523 order looked like this:

### **Pre-baptism ritual**

#### *Apertio*

Exsufflation and "lesser" exorcism

Signation

Collects: *O Almighty eternal God* and *O God, immortal Comfort*

Salt of exorcism

#### ***Sintflutgebet***

"Greater" exorcism

#### **Gospel** (Mark 10:13-16)

Imposition of hands and *traditio* of the Lord's Prayer

*Effeta*

*Apotaxis*

*Syntaxis* (Creed)

Anointing

### **Baptism**

### **Post-baptism ritual**

Signation with *chrism*

Vesting in white

Giving of candle

In a long epilogue to the 1523 rite Luther expressed that his major concern in the *Little Baptism Book* was to "baptize in German, in order that the sponsors and others present may be stirred to greater faith and more earnest devotion, and that the priests who administer the baptism should show greater concern for the good of the hearers."<sup>86</sup> But he also noted:

Now remember, too, that in baptism the external things are the least important, such as blowing under the eyes, signing with the cross, putting salt into the mouth, putting spittle and clay into the ears and nose, anointing the breast and shoulders with oil, signing the crown of the head with the chrism, putting on the christening robe, placing a burning candle in the hand, and whatever else

<sup>84</sup> J.D.C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: The Reformation Period* (London: SPCK, 1970), 9 – 16. Fisher shows in parallel columns how Luther's *Taufbüchlein* compares with the *Magdeburg Agende* of 1497.

<sup>85</sup> Nagel, 274.

<sup>86</sup> *AE* 53: 101.



has been added by man to embellish baptism. For most assuredly baptism can be performed without all these, and they are not the sort of devices from which the devil shrinks or flees.<sup>87</sup>

But he further remarked, “For the time being I did not want to make any marked changes in the order of baptism. But I would not mind if it could be improved...”<sup>88</sup>

Luther overcame his reticence to make changes over the next two years. By 1525 he and his associates had become more and more convinced that the need to excise many of the “external things” for the sake of clarifying the gospel in baptism outweighed the concern that such surgery would upset Hans and Lena in the pew. The evangelical Mass had been successfully introduced and was flourishing: it was again fitting that “something be dared in the name of Christ,” this time for baptism. The sacrament’s administration needed to be formulated in accord with Christ’s words and command. Where the medieval forms could be utilized in keeping with this, Luther felt they could be freely employed, but where they obscured the sacrament or failed to glorify the gospel, they could just as freely be omitted. Thus, in 1526, he issued *Das tauffbuchlin verdeutscht, auff’s new zu gericht*, a revised order based on his 1523 version of the medieval rite, but significantly reducing it in keeping with these principles. The new order compared in outline with the 1523 order:

<i>1523 Taufbüchlein</i>	<i>1526 Revised Order</i>
<b><i>Pre-baptism ritual</i></b>	<b><i>Pre-baptism ritual</i></b>
<i>Apertio</i>	<i>Apertio</i>
<i>Exsufflatio</i>	-----
“Lesser” exorcism	“Lesser” exorcism
Signation	Signation
Collects	-----
Salt of exorcism	-----
<i>Sintflutgebet</i>	<i>Sintflutgebet</i>
“Greater” exorcism	“Greater” exorcism
Gospel	Gospel
Our Father	Our Father
<i>Effeta</i>	-----
<i>Apotaxis</i>	<i>Apotaxis</i>
<i>Syntaxis</i> (Creed)	<i>Syntaxis</i> (Creed)
Anointing	-----
<b><i>Baptism</i></b>	<b><i>Baptism</i></b>
<b><i>Post-baptism ritual</i></b>	<b><i>Post-baptism ritual</i></b>
Signation with <i>chrism</i>	-----
Vesting in white	Vesting in white
Giving of candle	-----

Luther undertook his revision with (essentially) the medieval Roman rite as the starting point but with his focus on restoring baptism’s gospel integrity. Thus, his liturgical surgery was done without great concern for the ancient origin or purpose behind the various portions of the medieval rite that were from patristic initiation. Indeed, given the centuries-old milieu of infant baptism as the norm, there seemed little reason to do so. As a result, Luther’s reform reassessed and redirected the received rite of initiation, reordering, removing, and rewriting its parts to stress baptism as God’s promise and gift, especially to children. Luther used his 1523 *Taufbüchlein* epilogue as the preface to the 1526 order, again noting his concern that sponsors and parents

<sup>87</sup> AE 53: 102.

<sup>88</sup> AE 53: 103.

would understand and appreciate the gift of baptism to their child. What Luther retained from the medieval rite was rehabilitated and, in some cases, reinterpreted for this purpose: the parts of the pre-baptism ritual that he retained—the two exorcisms and the Flood Prayer—were used to underscore the necessity of baptism; the signation pointed to the gospel and grace of God. The other portions of the order similarly fulfilled manifest law/gospel purposes so that the central act of baptism might be rightly viewed as God’s grace. The 1526 rite became “immensely popular” influencing baptismal revisions throughout the wider Reformation and setting a trajectory for baptismal practice and emphasis that has continued to the present.

**Reflections on the Current Practice of Baptism in American Lutheranism**

Since the post-Reformation era, the trajectory of Luther’s reform emphasizing baptism over the wider practice of initiation has undergone a mid-course change in some Lutheran synods, while accelerating in others. Because of this, terminological confusion and theological disparity manifests itself within American Lutheranism today.

Luther’s 1526 order remained the basis for the primary rite of baptism for American Lutherans into the last century. Both immediate predecessor books to the current crop of American Lutheran hymnals, agendas, and occasional service books—the *Lutheran Agenda* (1948) and the *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958)—contained Luther’s 1526 order as the core of their rites. But with the creation of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978), *Lutheran Worship* (1982), *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (1993), and the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (1996) the celebration of baptism has become quite diverse among the various major American Lutheran bodies.<sup>89</sup> The table below shows the four rites in outline:

<i>LBW</i>	<i>LW</i>	<i>CW</i>	<i>ELH</i>
<i>The LBW rite either begins the service (infants) or occurs after the sermon (adults)</i>	<i>The LW rite begins the service.</i>	<i>The CW rite begins the service.</i>	<i>The ELH rite begins after the reading of the Holy Gospel</i>
<i>At the font:</i> Address Presentation Prayer Thanksgiving ( <i>Sintflutgebet</i> ) Renunciation Apostles’ Creed Baptism <i>At the altar:</i> Imposition of hands Signation (optionally with oil) Giving of candle Prayer for parents Congregational greeting	<i>In the nave:</i> Invocation Address Signation Gospel Charge to sponsors Lord’s Prayer <i>At the font:</i> Renunciation Apostles’ Creed Presentation Naming Baptism Blessing Giving of white garment Giving of candle <i>At the altar:</i>	<i>In the chancel:</i> Apostolic greeting Confession of sins Absolution <i>At the font:</i> Address (infants)/ Confession of faith (adults) Signation Baptism Blessing Exhortation to congregation Prayer	Hymn Versicles and responses Exhortation (Address) Thanksgiving Gospel Lord’s Prayer Signation Renunciation Trinitarian profession of faith Baptism Apostles’ Creed Prayer Admonition to sponsors Blessing

<sup>89</sup> The positive development in these books to include the main baptismal rite in the pew version should not go unnoticed.

	Prayer Prayer for parents Congregational greeting		
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Are these differences significant? A detailed analysis of these rites is not possible in this paper; some limited comments will be offered.<sup>90</sup>

### The Lutheran Book of Worship

It should be noted that the creators of the *LBW* baptism order looked back beyond the Reformation era to the patristic rite because they considered it normative.<sup>91</sup> In doing this, the *LBW* rite shows much more than the other rites the influence of liturgical renovations which came out of post-Vatican II Rome and which influenced the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW). That emphasis has seen baptism become once again integrated into a larger rite stressing baptism as part of Christian initiation. As a result, actions eschewed by Luther in his 1526 order such as the imposition of hands and the post-baptismal signation have been restored and re-interpreted evangelically. In addition to the manifestation of these influences in the actual form for baptism, the *Manual on the Liturgy* which accompanies the *LBW* encourages establishing “baptism festivals,” particularly for adults, in an attempt to recapture that aspect of the patristic initiation rite as well.<sup>92</sup> Along these same lines, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, following her Canadian partner, has also sought to resurrect the ancient catechumenate for use in a day of increased adult baptisms and as a means of enriching adult baptismal practice.<sup>93</sup> Evangelical rites for enrollment and the scrutinies (recast as blessings) have been created that are meant to culminate at the Easter Vigil.

In this regard, the *LBW* rite invites somewhat of an “attraction-avoidance” reaction. There is much to commend the connection re-established with the early church in view of baptism’s unique position in post-Reformation Christianity. Baptism is the one thing *par excellance* that transcends the differences and divisions between Christian churches: with the exception of Baptist churches that reject infant baptism and demand rebaptism, Christians acknowledge and accept one another’s baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” despite their theological differences about baptism. A rite that is more ecumenical in form by virtue of its closer connection to the “source-rite” of the early church is an advantage in communicating through recognizably shared ritual the transcendency of baptism, namely, that it connects to Christ and incorporates the baptized into the one, holy Church and not merely a denomination. From a mission perspective, the serious work done by the ELCA’s worship commission in reassessing baptism as part of the larger matter of initiation by evangelically rehabilitating the adult catechumenate for ministry in a “post-Christian,” or perhaps better, a “neo-pagan” culture is also attractive. On the “avoidance” side of things is the fact that shared ritual aspects between traditions often mean quite different things within traditions. Liturgical forms and acts cannot always communicate these differences when there may be need for such communication. The liturgy should not foster indifferentism. And, there is also the skepticism the lesson of history teaches: can the patristic rite truly be evangelically rehabilitated in view of the fact that it became imbued with legalisms and overshadowed the central act of baptism? And if it can, can its evangelical character be maintained?

### Lutheran Worship

<sup>90</sup> For the interested reader the *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship* discusses the *LBW* rite, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* gives the background for the rite contained in *LW*, and *Christian Worship: Manual*, Gary Baumler and Kermit Moldenhauer, eds. *Christian Worship: Manual* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993) gives a brief rationale for the *CW* rite. No comparable resource is yet available for *ELH*.

<sup>91</sup> Frank C. Senn, “The Shape and Content of Christian Initiation: An Exposition of the New Lutheran Liturgy of Holy Baptism,” *dialog*, 14 (Spring 1975): 103 – 106.

<sup>92</sup> Philip H. Pfatteicher, Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy: Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 170.

<sup>93</sup> Pfatteicher, Messerli, 170.

In contrast to the *LBW*, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's "compromise hymnal" *Lutheran Worship* adopted an order that affirmed the trajectory of Luther's 1526 order through its revision of the 1948 *Agenda*. (It should be noted, however, that such LC-MS worship resources as *Proclaim* show great sympathy for the direction taken by the *LBW*.) The giving of the lighted candle from Luther's 1523 *Taufbüchlein* and that of the white garment (retained in Luther's 1526 order) have been restored to the *LW* rite. Further restoration of such elements as the exorcisms are rumored for the revised hymnal now under preparation by the LC-MS.

In keeping with Luther, we should always ask the purpose and meaning of these renovations, additions, and restorations. As Schlink reminds, "We understand the actions which in many churches surround the baptismal act to be illustrative witnesses and symbolic clarifications. But theological interpretation and especially folk piety do not stop with this understanding."<sup>94</sup> For example, signation with anointing, something we saw done in the baptismal rite as early as the second century, has been identified with "sealing," a New Testament metaphor referring to baptism and especially the gift of the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22, Eph. 1:13, 4:30). Schlink parses its significance in the early church as "a ritual...whereby the Christological significance of Baptism, namely the subordination of the baptized under the rule of the Crucified, was emphasized."<sup>95</sup> So far, so good: under such an understanding the practice is both meaningful and edifying. But when later in medieval baptismal practice the oil *per se* had become imbued with potencies and virtues via consecration, a skewing of proper focus and loss of biblical truth was the result: now, not so good. Similarly, the performance of exorcism was associated with baptism from early on in its ritual development. Luther, as we have seen, retained both the lesser and greater exorcisms in his 1526 order.<sup>96</sup> Where the act and words are understood as the ministrant's command for Satan to leave—an expression of the renunciation of Satan's works and ways implicit in baptism—the act is impressive and supports baptism. The very fact that it is jarring to "modern sensibilities" that are embarrassed by such a frank confrontation of the reality of Satan, is itself a useful reminder that "it is this *reality* that the Church has in mind, that it indeed *faces*...at Baptism."<sup>97</sup> Indeed, so far, so good. Yet this same act has also become invested with notions of being a pre-requisite or qualifier for a valid baptism through deliverance from the rule of sin rather than from Satan. Now, not so good. Again, the point is the need for the accompanying ceremonies of baptism to illustrate and confirm the central act of baptism, not obscure it. History suggests problems that should be carefully considered.

### Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal

The *CW* rite reflects another phenomenon within the telling of the modern tale of baptism among Lutherans. If the *LBW* redirects Luther's trajectory back toward the first three centuries and *LW* "stands pat" in that trajectory with its revision of *The Lutheran Agenda*, then it may be suggested that *CW* has accelerated along the path of Luther's trajectory.

In constructing the baptism rite for *CW*, the "Joint Hymnal Committee" charged with *CW*'s production sought especially to bring the baptism rite fully into the liturgy by carefully tooling it to replace the preparation service.<sup>98</sup> *Christian Worship: Manual* notes that the catalyst for this goal was the shift "within the past fifty years" for baptism to be celebrated once again within the congregation's worship rather than privately or in a baptistery.<sup>99</sup> Because of this essentially new development, the *JHC* thought a fresh approach to the rite was

<sup>94</sup> Schlink, 199.

<sup>95</sup> Schlink, 196.

<sup>96</sup> Luther's rendering of these is typically strong and rugged. Thus the greater exorcism: "I adjure thee, thou unclean spirit, by the name of the Father ✠ and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Ghost ✠ that thou come out of and depart from this servant of Jesus Christ, N. Amen." *AE*, 53;108.

<sup>97</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World to Come* (New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1974), 49.

<sup>98</sup> *Christian Worship: Manual*, Gary Baumler and Kermit Moldenhauer, eds. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 165.

<sup>99</sup> *CW: Manual*, 165.

warranted rather than a reworking of the 1948 *Lutheran Agenda* rite since that rite was constructed with private celebration in mind.<sup>100</sup>

Now, unlike the *LBW*, the emphasis in the *CW* order is not initiation with baptism at its heart, but baptism as initiation *per se* so that the historic elements of the pre- and post-baptismal rites have been dispensed with even more than by Luther (but certainly in line with Luther's insights). In their place the committee sought to connect baptism to the Christian's subsequent life by the incorporation of confession and absolution within the order of baptism, a feature especially extolled by Rev. John Koelpin in a *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* article, "The Uniqueness of the Rite of Baptism in *CW*" (1997). Koelpin demonstrates the lively connection between baptism and confession-absolution, and notes, "Perhaps it is presumptuous, but this author contends on the basis of Luther's own understanding [of the role confession and absolution as a continuance of baptism], that he would have been delighted to see...baptism as it appears in *CW*. The combination of corporate confession and baptism make the rite of baptism in *CW* truly unique."<sup>101</sup> The linkage between baptism and confession and absolution is reinforced by a brief printed rationale under the rite's title and by the words spoken by the presiding minister prefacing the confession. The post-baptism is also streamlined to include only an exhortation to the congregation and a prayer.

Innovation is always risky and *CW*'s baptism rite has met with somewhat mixed reviews within the WELS.<sup>102</sup> The order has solved the awkwardness that was inherent in using the *Lutheran Agenda* for baptism in the Sunday liturgy by giving the sacrament a seamless "home" when a baptism is celebrated in the Sunday service. Moreover, parishioners who may not savor or articulate the connection between absolution and baptism as fully as Pastor Koelpin, nonetheless appreciate not having confession and absolution omitted when baptism is celebrated (as it is by *LW: Agenda*'s revised rite). However, the rite has been criticized as being too brief and for its perceived muted testimony of the first two parts of baptism from the *Small Catechism*.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps the most frequent criticism has been over the absence of the Apostles' Creed—the historical baptismal creed—in connection with baptism. The Creed is retained in its place in the Service of the Word of the liturgy. As Rev. Victor Prange notes, as an innovation that departed significantly from its predecessor rite, "Time will tell whether this effort to integrate the rite of Holy Baptism into the Confession of Sins part of the liturgy will have a lasting effect on future worship forms."<sup>104</sup>

<sup>100</sup> The "new agenda book" being produced to accompany *Christian Worship, Christian Worship: Occasional Services* will contain a "stand alone" rite for baptism designed primarily for smaller settings or "private baptism." The rite, "Holy Baptism II" reproduces the order of Luther's 1526 rite more closely and includes the *Sintflutgebet* and other features. This rite offers options that congregations may desire to include in the regular *CW* rite. In outline, "Holy Baptism II" looks like this:

Hymn

*At the font:*

Invocation

Address

Signation

*Sintflutgebet*

Apostles' Creed

Presentation (infants)/Baptismal desire and renunciation of Satan (adults)

Exhortation to parents/sponsors

Exhortation to congregation

Giving of white garment

Giving of candle

Prayer

Lord's Prayer (optional)

Blessing

<sup>101</sup> John Koelpin, "The Uniqueness of the Rite of Baptism in *Christian Worship*," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 94:1 (Winter 1997): 32.

<sup>102</sup> See Victor H. Prange, "The Shaping of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*," *Not Unto Us: A Celebration of the Ministry of Kurt J. Eggert*, William H. Braun and Victor H. Prange, eds. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002), 220-221, for some of the JHC's discussions and deliberations about the rite.

<sup>103</sup> Paul Alliet, "Confessing the Faith in *Christian Worship*," *Logia*, 3:2 (Eastertide/April 1994): 56 – 57.

<sup>104</sup> Prange, 221.

Liturgy has been rightly called “prayed doctrine.” A survey like this of the history of baptism’s ritual celebration combines with the dogmatics of baptism given us in the first presentation to give us insights and understanding into why baptism is celebrated as it is among us. Such an exercise also sharpens us to consider the challenges to baptism the third essayist will discuss. However, beyond serving the immediate purpose of this symposium, it should also encourage us to see that stewardship of this sacrament is a sacred charge given to each successive generation of the church. This stewardship is not a static thing, but dynamic as it seeks to bring the sacrament to the generation it serves in a way that is faithful to Scripture, that proclaims the gospel that *is* baptism, and that also expresses in salutary ritual the gathering of Christ’s people into the *Una Sancta*. Baptism’s ritual history offers possible answers to challenges a “neo-pagan” society poses in the practice of outreach and the assimilation of new converts, while also teaching avoidance of emphases or directions that have obscured baptism in the past. Prayerfully, a survey like this of baptism’s ritual history will also encourage us to explore our corporate and personal piety with respect to baptism as it shows how awesome the sacrament has been to previous ages and how the sacrament has been administered in the past. May its contemplation lead us to preach baptism fervently, celebrate it devotionally, and exhibit it more prominently in whatever ways we can—in the church year, in music, art, architecture—so that baptism, the bath of mercy, may serve us as our gracious baptizing God intends.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

*Appendix: Luther's Sintflutgebet, 1523*

Allmächtiger, ewiger Gott, der du hast durch die Sintfluth nach deinem gestrengen Gericht die ungläubige Welt verdammt und den gläubigen Noah selb acht nach deiner großen Barmherzigkeit erhalten, und den verstockten Pharao mit allen den Seinen im rothen Meer ersäuft, und dein Volk Israel trocken hindurch geführt, damit dies Bad deiner heiligen Taufe zukünftig bezeichnet und durch die Taufe deines lieben Kindes, unsers Herrn Jesu Christi, den Jordan und aller Wasser zur seligen Sintfluth und reichlichen Abwaschung der Sünden geheiligt und eingesetzt. Wir bitten durch dieselbe deine grundlose Barmherzigkeit, du wollest diesen

N—— gnädiglich ansehen und mit rechtem Glauben im Geist beseligen, daß durch diese heilsame Sintfluth an ihm ersaue und untergehe alles, was ihm von Adam angeboren ist und er selbst dazu gethan hat, und er, aus der Ungläubigen Zahl gesondert, in der heiligen Arche der Christenheit trocken und sicher behalten, allzeit brünstig im Geist, fröhlich in Hoffnung, deinem Namen diene, auf daß er mit allen Gläubigen deiner Verheißung ewiges Leben zu erlangen würdig werde, durch Jesum Christum, unsern Herrn, Amen.<sup>105</sup>

(Almighty, everlasting God, who by your righteous judgment destroyed the unbelieving world by the Flood and by your great mercy saved faithful Noah and his family; who drowned hard-hearted Pharaoh with all his army in the Red Sea and led your people Israel through on dry ground thereby prefiguring your bath of Holy Baptism; who through the baptism of your dear Child, our Lord Jesus Christ, sanctified and ordained the Jordan and all waters as a saving flood and an abundant cleansing of sin: we pray that by your boundless mercy you would look mercifully upon N— and bless him with a true faith in the Spirit that, by this healing flood, all may be drowned and destroyed in him that has been born of Adam and which he himself has done; and that he, separated out of the number of the unbelieving, may be kept safe and dry in ark of Christianity, ever fervent in spirit and joyful hope to serve your name, so that he may, with all the faithful be counted worthy to obtain the promise of eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen)

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<sup>105</sup> St. Louis Edition, X, 2141.

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