

The Uniqueness Of The Rite Of Baptism In Christian Worship

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Introduction

God, in his own wisdom, determined to communicate his grace to sinful mankind through the means of his gospel, found in the Word and in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Quite naturally, then, these means of grace find prominence in the worship of God's people. Since worship is that blessed two-sided conversation between God and his people, God's people give proper distinction to God's half of the conversation through the reading and preaching of his Word and the administering of the sacraments. The forms in which these means of grace have been communicated over the centuries have expanded and contracted. The liturgy (the rite in which the Word and sacraments are regularly administered) has fluctuated dramatically as each generation and each people have determined how best to present the gospel to the gathering of God's people.

The generation of late 20th Century WELS Lutherans is no different. In response to the changes time brings, the people of the WELS encouraged the development of a new/revised hymnal. In the fall of 1993, the new hymnal was introduced, *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (CW from here on).

As the forms in which the means of grace are used within the church change, we can and should evaluate them. When making any evaluation one must ask two important questions, "What makes this good?" and "What can be improved?" Such an evaluation presupposes a detailed look at the parts. But in so doing we must be careful not to lose sight of the whole.

This evaluation focuses on the rite of baptism in CW. But before we evaluate this rite in its parts we will answer the question concerning the rite as a whole. Is the rite of baptism in CW a good rite of baptism? To answer that question, let us ask another, "What makes a good rite of baptism?" The answer is simple. Scripture teaches that baptism needs two things, water and the Word. Paul makes that clear when he alludes to baptism in Ephesians, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word" (Ephesians 5:25,26). Christ instructs us as to what that Word should be when he speaks to his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20) (emphasis added). A good rite of baptism is one which encourages the application of water on the person brought forward for baptism, done so in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Is the rite of baptism in CW a good rite? Yes it is. Note the words taken from "Holy Baptism" in CW, "The minister applies water to the person presented for baptism as he says: , I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (p. 14). That kernel is all that is necessary for a baptism. If there were nothing else in the rite of baptism save the water and the Word, it would be a good rite of baptism. All the questions, admonitions, prayers, and encouragements are extras, added to extol the blessings which God gives through water and the Word.

It is on those extras, however, that we will focus. They are the things concerning which "each generation trims a little and adds a little (extolling is never finished)" (Nagel, p. 287). The various parts which each generation has either added to or subtracted from baptism are those things which make various rites distinctive. A brief look at the history of the rite of baptism will reveal that the rite in CW is truly unique. That history will highlight the uniqueness of the rite of baptism in CW.

Baptism in the Scriptures

Our starting point for this study will be the Scriptures. What can we glean from the Scriptures themselves concerning the rite of baptism? The Bible knows much about baptisms long before Christ commanded to baptize in the name of the Triune God. To baptize is to wash with water. There were various water washings prescribed in the Old Testament (confer Exodus 40:12-15). Add to those the allusions the prophets made to the moral cleansing provided by God, as the words of Ezekiel declare, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols" (Ezekiel 36:25). There is also evidence that the Jews accepted Gentiles into Judaism through a "proselyte baptism." These washings were still being practiced among the Jews when John the Baptist came preparing the people for the coming Messiah, "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4).

John's baptism marks a change. It was John who baptized our Lord Jesus Christ. His is the first New Testament baptism recorded in any detail. Matthew tells us of the events:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:13-17).

The greatness of this account is its simplicity. There, with water and the Word, John baptized Jesus. The rite is wrapped up in the words, "Then John consented." There are no extras here; at least none are recorded by the Evangelists.

The same simplicity marks the references to baptism during the rest of Jesus' ministry. John mentions that the disciples baptized as they accompanied Jesus in his travels (John 3:22-26,4:1,2). Aside from Jesus' figurative reference to baptism to James and John (Mark 10:38,39) and his discussion with Nicodemus (John 3:5), there is no other mention of baptism in the ministry of Jesus. Still, baptisms must have occurred, for it was no novelty when Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize shortly before his ascension. There Christ commanded to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, giving his disciples and us the full rite of baptism. Nothing need be added to what Christ gave his church in those words. With that word of God connected with the water Christ himself gave us the rite of baptism. Paul echoes the simplicity of baptism when he says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word" (Ephesians 5:25,26).

The disciples took Christ's command seriously. On the day of Pentecost Peter announced, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). As the disciples (including Paul) continued to reach out with the Word and sacraments, more is mentioned in the Scriptures about baptism. The most important liturgical development we can glean from these references is the inclusion of a confession of faith as a part of baptism. We catch a glimpse of such a confession in the words of Acts 22:16, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, *calling on his name*" (emphasis added). Although Scripture makes no direct connection between the following confessions and baptism, we do see the beginnings of formal confessions in the letters of Paul. These are the seeds which later became the Apostles' Creed, which was primarily a baptismal confession. Paul tells the Philippian congregation,

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted

him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and *every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11) (emphasis added).

Other hymns found in Paul's letter's may also have been used in the baptismal service, such as those found in Ephesians 5:14, "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you," and 1 Timothy 3:16, "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory."

Scholars have found other additions to the baptismal service elsewhere in the Scriptures. Ralph P. Martin, in his book *Worship in the Early Church*, states,

There are parts of the New Testament Scripture where we may plausibly seek not only mention of the act of baptism, but a series of acts associated with Church membership. Admittedly this means reading back from a later time when such ceremonials were common practice. The ceremonials are: anointing with oil (cf. 1 John 2:20ff), which is sometimes alluded to as 'sealing' (see 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30; 2 Timothy 2:19); the laying on of hands (with special application to ordination: the hymns of 1 Timothy 6:11-16; 2 Timothy 2:11-13 may refer to this); and the tasting of new food (in the first Communion administered following baptism. Some scholars find allusion to this in Hebrews 6:4f and 1 Peter 2:3). Post-baptismal lustrations may too be referred to in Hebrews 6:2; 10:22 and John 13:10 (p. 109).

We would go too far to say that these references, pieced together in just the right way, give us a full baptismal service from the Scriptures, similar to the one we find in later centuries. However, they do help us understand where subsequent generations found the seeds for later liturgical additions. In viewing the above Scripture references, Martin himself places before us a caveat:

It is easy to be incautious about some of these identifications and to be attracted by a superficial resemblance of language only. The danger of a 'pan-liturgism' is a present one today; and we do well to heed the salutary warning of Professor van Unnik who reminds us that the liturgies and Church orders are later in time than the literature of the pristine Church of the first century (p. 109).

We have spent a fair amount of time looking into Scripture for its insights into the rite of baptism. Although it does not give us one clear picture of the developments concerning the rite after Christ's commission, it provides us with the base upon which the centuries to follow added to or subtracted from the rite of baptism.

Baptism in the Centuries between Christ and the Council of Nicea

There are precious few documents detailing the rite of baptism before the fourth century. But those we do have give us a picture of simplicity compared to the rites that developed after the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.

The simplicity of the rite given in the Scriptures seems to have been the rule in the centuries immediately following Christ's ascension. Although few documents survive from that period which could give us a full picture of the rite, we can begin to piece together some of the developments surrounding baptism. Simple additions were already being made to baptism as early as 100 A.D. *The Didache*, written circa 100 A.D., instructs the baptizer to first listen to a confession of faith in the teaching of the church and then baptize. It also notes that this should not be done unless "the baptizer and him that is to be baptized and such others as are able

first to fast; but thou shalt bid him that is to be baptized fast one or two [days?] before" (*Didache* 7, found in Whitaker, p. 1). Aside from those instructions the baptismal service appears quite simple. It merely advises, "Baptize in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in running water. But if you have not running water, baptize in other water; and if you can not in cold, then in warm. And if you have not either, pour forth water thrice upon the head, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (ibid).

A half century later (circa 160 A.D.) Justin Martyr included a section on baptism in his defense of the Christian religion sent to the Emperor. Again, the service appears simple, the most important thing being the baptism itself. However, specific time for prayer before and after the baptism (both for the baptized and by the baptized) has been added as well as a fuller confession of faith. Concerning the confession Justin writes, "Over him that now chooses to be reborn and repents of his sins is named the Father and Lord God of all things....And he that is being enlightened is washed in the Name of Jesus Christ who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the Name of the Holy Spirit, which through the prophets foretold all things concerning Jesus" (Justin Martyr 61, found in Whitaker, p. 2). The seeds of the Apostles' Creed sown in the Scriptures were beginning to grow!

The most detailed descriptions of the rite of baptism from this period come from two sources, Hippolytus (in *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*) and Tertullian. Hippolytus writes about the liturgy of baptism in Rome circa 215 A.D. and Tertullian about the rite in Northern Africa sometime around 200 A.D. Both reveal a significant advance in the addition of set forms surrounding the simple act of baptism. Hippolytus writes in a straightforward manner concerning the ins and outs of the baptismal rite, including such additions as an inquiry about the sanctified life of the catechumen (i.e., a person receiving instruction, but not yet baptized), the length of instruction for the catechumen (he suggests three years), the praying of prayers and the kiss of peace, the laying on of hands, exorcisms, renunciations, night vigils, early morning baptisms, the preparation and use of special oils, sponsors, and a much fuller credal confession.

More will be said about many of these inclusions to the rite of baptism. However, let it suffice at this time to hear what Hippolytus has to say about the use of sponsors and the expansion of the creed. The idea of sponsors seems to stem from a fear of infiltration of the church by hypocrites. Whereas today sponsors generally function as speakers on behalf of infants, in the days of the early Christian Church adults, who could speak for themselves, were also given sponsors. Why? Hippolytus answers, "And when they are chosen who are set apart to receive baptism let their life be examined, whether they lived piously while catechumens, whether they 'honored the widows,' whether they visited the sick, whether they have fulfilled every good work. *If those who bring them bear witness to them* that they have done thus, let them hear the gospel" (Hippolytus XX:1,2, found in Whitaker, p. 4, emphasis added).

According to Hippolytus, the candidate for baptism was asked for a credal confession while he/she was being baptized. I give it here in full that we might see how far the creed had come from Paul's early creed in Philippians, to Justin's somewhat longer confession, to the one here that sounds fairly close to the Apostles' Creed we confess today.

And as he goes down to the water, let him who baptizes lay hand on him saying thus:

Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?

And he who is being baptized shall say:

I believe.

Let him forthwith baptize him once, having his hand laid upon his head. After this let him say:

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?

And when he says: I believe, let him baptize him the second time.

And again let him say:

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Church, And the resurrection of the flesh?

And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe. And so let him baptize him the third time
 (Hippolytus XXI:12-18, found in Whitaker, pp. 5,6).

The creed and its explanation came to play a pivotal role in the instruction of the catechumens and in the final rites surrounding the day of baptism in later centuries.

Tertullian's insights into the rite of baptism are more prosaic than instructional. Many of his comments concerning the rite come from his general treatise on baptism entitled *De Baptismo*. Near the beginning of the treatise, Tertullian extols the simpleness of baptism, saying, "Because with such complete simplicity, without display, without any unusual equipment, and (not least) without anything to pay, a man is sent down into the water, is washed to the accompaniment of very few words, and comes up little or no cleaner than he was, his attainment to eternity is regarded as beyond belief" (*De Baptismo* 2, found in Whitaker p. 7). However, by the time he finishes his treatise, Tertullian has given the impression that the rite of baptism is anything but simple. More and more came to be added to the rite—prayers, exorcisms, renunciations, examinations, confessions, anointings of all kinds, and laying on of hands. Tertullian also added his own explanations concerning why each step was added, complete with Old Testament allusions and mystical interpretations, as well as a set of "rules" (as he calls them) concerning who can and should baptize. The church had begun a dangerous move toward formalism and away from the simple blessings promised by God in the Word. Norman E. Nagel, in his article "Holy Baptism," asserts,

What begins as extolling all the wondrous gifts of baptism, goes on to begin to separate them and assign them into the sequence of points at which the separated gifts are actually given, rather than extolled....Here is the beginning of the breaking up of Baptism into a sequence of things we do. A reference to the church in Tertullian grew later into the church being regarded as the guarantor of Baptism, rather than the reverse (p. 267).

This inverse proportion between the additions to the rite of baptism and the gradual decline in the proper theological understanding of baptism continued until it reached its height in the fourth century and beyond.

The Rite of Baptism in the Post-Nicene Church: The Church of the Fourth Century

With the conversion of Emperor Constantine (312 A.D.), the Christian Church experienced a period of relaxation. This brought about an explosion of structure and formalization, to which the rite of baptism was not immune. Each city center boasted its best catechist and with that its own rite of baptism. Though each one had its peculiarities, they were in the main similar in structure.

The rite of baptism had grown to such a point by the fourth century that the actual baptism was all but lost in a sea of other pre- and post-baptismal rites. In fact, so much was included in the rites both before and after the actual baptism, that most books refer to this subject as "The Rite of Initiation," rather than "The Rite of

Baptism." The rite of baptism became a small part of a much larger process. It included the rite of the catechumenate, preparation for baptism, blessing of the holy oils, baptism, confirmation, and first communion (Duchesne, p. 295ff). This long process essentially had two parts, the catechumenate (period of instruction), which could last a number of years and came to an intense conclusion during Lent, and the baptismal service which began sometime during Holy Week with the baptism on Easter or Pentecost morning.

Already in Hippolytus we noted the three-year catechumenate. A certain period of instruction before the baptism of adults is not foreign to Scripture. Philip clarified the Word for the eunuch before he was baptized, Peter preached a sermon before the Pentecost baptisms, and Paul gave instructions to the jailer and his family in Philippi. In the fourth century, however, the instruction of the catechumens became a rite within the rite of baptism itself. The rite of the catechumenate included an exsufflation (a breathing onto the catechumens by the presiding priest) with an exorcism, the signing of the cross on the forehead, and the administering of salt in the mouth.

Once included in the church as a catechumen, a person could linger as such for a long time. Some people remained catechumens until shortly before their death, because of the misunderstanding that baptism forgave only past sins. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, was a catechumen when he was elected bishop and had to be quickly baptized before his ordination (Jeanes, p.7). The lectures during these years accomplished much the same as do our present-day catechism classes or adult instruction/Bible information courses. They were a period of time when those unfamiliar with the truths of God's Word came to know them in as much detail as time and circumstances allowed. The final instructions, however, were saved until the forty days of Lent.

This intense forty days of instruction formed another rite within the rite. Cyril of Jerusalem, whose catechetical lectures appear to be the most complete set of such lectures now extant, gives us his insight as to why these final instructions began in Lent: "Knowing well that seeing is far more persuasive than hearing, I waited till this season, that, finding you more open to the influence of my word from this your experience, I might take and lead you to the brighter and more fragrant meadow of this present paradise" (*Mystagogical Catechesis*, 1.1, from Baldovin, p.16). For Cyril, at least, the reason seemed to be more pedagogical than anything. I suspect Cyril had an advantage teaching in Jerusalem. The subject matter of the Lenten lectures varied. Cyril's lectures included an explanation of the creed (the high point in most of the lecture series), a general introduction, and some lectures on the nature of baptism itself. Others included lectures on the Lord's Prayer or as one visitor to Jerusalem in the late fourth century noted,

His [the bishop's] subject is God's Law; during the forty days he goes through the whole Bible, beginning with Genesis, and first relating the literal meaning of each passage, then interpreting its spiritual meaning....After five weeks' teaching they receive the Creed, whose content he explains in the same way as he explained the Scriptures, first literally and then spiritually (Baldovin, p. 12)

The Lenten instructions built up to the baptism on Easter morning. On the Saturday before Easter the last of the lectures was given and the catechumens prepared themselves for their baptism in the morning. The baptismal service itself was rich in symbolism. Before dawn the catechumens were led to the baptistery and prepared for their baptism. Prior to entering the water, an *Ephatha* was performed on each individually (one of many which were performed on them throughout their catechumenate). Ambrose of Milan explains the *Ephatha*:

The mysteries of the opening were celebrated when the bishop touched the ears and nostrils. What does this mean? In the gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ, when a deaf and dumb man was brought to him, touched his ears and mouth...and said "Effatha," a Hebrew word which means, "Be opened." And so the bishop touched your ears to open them to the words of the bishop and what he was to say (Jeanes, p.9).

Once inside the baptistery the catechumens disrobed in an act symbolic of putting off the old Adam. They were exorcised for the final time (again, this occurred many times throughout their instructions) and all faced west for their final renunciation of the devil:

First you entered into the outer hall of the baptistery, and there facing towards the west you heard the command to stretch out your hand, and as in the presence of Satan you renounced him....However, you are bidden with arm outstretched to say to him as though actually present, *I renounce you*, Satan. I wish to say wherefore you stand facing west, for it is necessary. Since the west is the region of sensible darkness, and he being darkness has his dominion in darkness, you therefore looking with symbolical meaning towards the west, renounce that dark and gloomy potentate (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catechesis* I.2,4, found in Whitaker, pp. 27,28).

This renunciation was followed immediately by a turning to the east and a confession of faith in the Triune God. Again, Cyril explains,

When therefore you renounce Satan, treading under foot all covenant with him, and breaking that ancient league with hel, there is opened to you the paradise of God, which he planted towards the east, whence for his transgression our first father was exiled; and symbolical of this was your turning from the west to the east, the place of light. Then were you told to say, *I believe in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Ghost and in one Baptism of repentance* (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catechesis* I.9, found in Whitaker, p. 28).

Finally, the catechumens were baptized. A simple statement of faith was asked for and the catechumens were dipped or immersed three times in the waters of the baptistery. Significantly, after the baptism the catechumens were anointed with oil (many such anointings took place throughout the catechumenate) together with a laying on of the presiding priest's hands at which time the catechumens were told they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this way the giving of the Holy Spirit was removed from baptism and given to the hand of the baptizer (Nagel, p. 267).

The catechumens were now among the elect. In a final symbolic act they put on new, pristine robes (Colossians 3:10) and entered the church to receive their first communion.

What has this brief look at these rites of baptism accomplished? Two things. First, it has let us see how the rite of baptism expanded over the centuries, to the point where the simple act of baptism, with its pure gospel message, was in danger of being lost in a sea of manmade rules and rites (could *ex opere operato* be far off?). History records that as more infants came to be baptized than adults the length of the ritual was slowly compressed into little more than one private service. Nonetheless, many of the added extras were retained. Second, it has given us a backdrop against which we can see the uniqueness of the rite of baptism in *CW* within the history of the Church.

Luther's Revisions to the Rite of Baptism

The rite of baptism remained essentially the same up to the time of the Reformation. In fact, in the early 1500s Luther felt compelled to finally translate the rite of baptism from Latin into German. Luther's translation makes it clear that many of the extras added to the rite of baptism were retained in some small form or another through the generations.

Luther's intent in translating the Latin rite of baptism in 1523 was not at all to make any revisions. He said as much in his accompanying preface to the translation, stating,

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. Its framers were careless men who did not sufficiently

appreciate the glory of baptism. However, in order to spare the weak consciences, I am leaving it unchanged, lest they complain that I want to institute a new baptism and criticize those baptized in the past as though they had not been properly baptized (*LW*:53, p. 103).

Luther's level-headed approach to change and his sensitivity to the consciences of others are clear.

Luther understood, however, that there had been much added to the rite of baptism that could be done without. "Now remember, too," he says in the same preface, "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 the burning candle in the hand, and whatever else has been added by man to embellish baptism" (*LW*:53, p. 102).

Although his 1523 translation aimed at giving the people the same old rite, except in German, Luther, did make a few subtle changes. We mention only two of them here. The first was Luther's addition of his *Sindflutgebet*, or Great Flood Prayer. Neither time nor space allow me to include it here; nevertheless, let this brief evaluation of the prayer from Hughes Oliphant Old suffice to impress you: "Viewed in terms of biblical imagery, liturgical history, and pastoral sensitivity, Luther's prayer is a masterpiece" (Old, p. 37).

The second change involved the omitting of some of the exorcisms used in the Latin rite. Perhaps this change seems uncharacteristic of a man who fought so visibly with the devil that legend has Luther throwing his ink jar at the wall in an effort to do battle with the devil. Luther himself gave no reason for this omission. Old gives us his understanding: "The medieval exorcisms took the place of the prayers of confession and repentance in the earliest Christian baptismal rites. This constituted the *metanoia*, the turning away from the world and toward God. Thus *Luther should have substituted a prayer of repentance or confession of sin for some of these exorcisms*" (Old, p. 37, emphasis added). In a few moments, this insight will prove valuable in our discussion of the rite of baptism in *CW*.

Three years after Luther made his translation, he revised the rite completely. He did away with many of the additions with which he felt uncomfortable. The 1526 rite is short, simple, and properly extols the pure gospel blessings of baptism.

The rite of baptism went through many editions and revisions from its institution by Christ on the mount to the time of the Reformation. Some extolled the blessings of baptism with additions, others by pruning. Through the entire process God's grace saw to it that baptism itself was never totally lost. And God has graciously placed baptism among us. Still, the process of revision continues. The completion of the new hymnal *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* introduced another revision of the rite of baptism. This rite is unlike any we have seen so far. But before we examine its uniqueness, let us consider some of the influences which helped mold the rite of baptism in *CW*.

The Influences Which Have Molded the Unique Rite of Baptism in *CW*

Luther's 1526 revision represented a marked change in the history of the rite of baptism. The rite was shorter, more precise, and placed greater emphasis on baptism than on ritual. Most of the Protestant baptismal rites of today reflect this change. But it was Luther's theology of baptism which has been more influential on the rite of baptism in *CW* than his revision of the rite. Luther's theology together with the changing circumstances in which baptisms are performed have had the greatest effect on tailoring the unique rite of baptism in *CW*.

Luther correctly understood the full impact of baptism on the life of a Christian. For Luther baptism was not a one-time magical incantation. Luther had learned from Scripture that the Christian lived in his baptism from the moment the rite was performed until his death. This, however, did not mean that the Christian needed to be baptized again and again. Baptism was performed once. There God's declaration of "not guilty" was announced and the baptized "died to sin, was buried with Christ to live a new life, crucified the body of sin, and was freed from sin" (paraphrase of Romans 6:1-11). But the baptized still sin. How can this declaration be valid when the thoughts and life of the Christian seem to declare otherwise? Why does the Christian not need to be

baptized again when daily he seems to fall far short of his baptism? The answer lies in the understanding of the relationship between baptism and confession.

Luther explained baptism in the terms of sign, significance, and faith. He writes,

The sign consists in this, that we are thrust into the water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; however, we are not left there but are drawn out again....The significance of baptism is a blessed dying unto sin and a resurrection in the grace of God, so that the old man, conceived and born in sin, is there drowned, and a new man, born in grace, comes forth and rises. Thus St. Paul, in Titus 3[:5], calls baptism a "washing of regeneration," since in this washing a person is born again and made new....The significance of baptism—the dying or drowning—is not fulfilled completely in this life. Indeed this does not happen until man passes through bodily death and completely decays to dust....Therefore this whole life is nothing else than a spiritual baptism which does not cease till death....Faith means that one firmly believes all this: that this sacrament not only signifies death and the resurrection at the Last Day, by which a person is made new to live without sin eternally, but also that it assuredly begins and achieves this; that it establishes a covenant between us and God to the effect that we will fight against sin and slay it, while he for his part will be merciful to us....It is faith like this that the devil attacks most of all. If he can overthrow it, he has won the battle. For the sacrament of penance also has its foundation in this sacrament, inasmuch as sins are forgiven only to those who are baptized, to those whose sins God has promised to forgive. The sacrament of penance thus renews and points out again the sacrament of baptism (*LW*:35, p. 30,35,38).

On the basis of statements such as these, Regin Prenter, in his essay on Luther's theology of baptism, asks, "How can we explain this strange tension between the unique act of the baptismal rite, which is performed only once and is soon completed, and its significance, which occupies the whole life of man in a long series of repeated acts?" (*More About Luther*, p. 88). It can be answered only in understanding the tension between the total and complete righteousness of Christ, given in baptism, and the sinfulness in which the baptized person lives. Luther understood it as the tension inherent in "simul justus et peccator." Luther answers Prenter's question by saying,

When someone comes forth out of baptism, he is truly pure, without sin, and wholly guiltless. Still, there are many who do not properly understand this. They think that sin is no longer present, and so they become remiss and negligent in the killing of their sinful nature, even as some do when they have gone to confession. For this reason it should be properly understood and known that our sinful flesh, so long as it lives here, is by nature wicked and sinful. To correct this wickedness God has devised a plan of making our flesh altogether new....This plan begins in baptism, which signifies death and the resurrection at the Last Day. Therefore so far as the sign of the sacrament and its significance are concerned, sins and the man are both already dead, and he has risen again; and so the sacrament has already taken place. But the work of the sacrament has not yet been fully done, which is to say that death and the resurrection at the Last Day are still before us (*LW*:35, p. 32).

Luther comprehended that because of God's personal covenant with sinners, made and sealed at baptism, the Christian was both saint and sinner at the same time. Thus baptism gave what it promised, a new life, wholly pleasing to God and no longer under the control of sin. And yet the baptized remained in sin. Here confession and absolution continually reminded the sinner of the certainty of God's grace given in baptism and assured him his sins were indeed forgiven. The sure hope of sins forgiven and the strength to lead a new life

after baptism find their foundation in baptism, where the gift of Christ's righteousness was delivered and sealed. Again, we will let Luther speak for himself. He writes in his treatise *De captiuitate Babylonica*:

This message should have been impressed upon the people untiringly, and this promise should have been dinned into their ears without ceasing. Their baptism should have been called to their minds again and again, and their faith constantly awakened and nourished. For just as the truth of this divine promise, once pronounced over us, continues until death, so our faith in it ought never to cease, but to be nourished and strengthened until death by the continual remembrance of this promise made to us in baptism. Therefore, when we rise from our sins or repent, we are merely returning to the power and the faith of baptism from which we fell, and finding our way back to the promise then made to us, which we deserted when we sinned. For the truth of the promise once made remains steadfast, always ready to receive us back with open arms when we return (Tappert, p. 411).

Luther's understanding of the continuing significance of baptism was firmly rooted in Scripture. Hadn't Paul taken us back to our baptism as the source of comfort and strength against sin when he wrote to the church at Rome:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:1-11).

For Luther baptism and confession could hardly be separated. Once baptized, the righteous sinner entered into a lifetime of renewal and remembrance of that baptism through daily contrition and repentance.

With such an understanding of the connection between baptism and confession, we might anticipate that Luther would have attempted to combine the two in his rite of baptism. He omits it for good reason, as did all of the rites in the past. The rubrics from Luther's rite of baptism lead us to believe that baptisms were not generally done in the church service before the congregation. Baptism was generally a private service done with the sponsors, parents, and priest. Even the ancient rites of baptism were special services done apart from the assembled congregation. No corporate confession of sins exists in any of the rites of baptism because it was not the custom to perform baptism before the corporate body of believers.

It is unclear when the custom to perform baptism in the regular Sunday worship service arose. Herman Sasse, in his essay on baptism, surmises that Calvin and the Reformed church introduced the practice of baptizing in front of the congregation based on a misunderstanding of the sacrament as a mere rite of initiation instead of a washing of regeneration (Sasse, p. 47,48). Whatever the initial reason, baptisms today are performed most often in the worship service in the presence of the congregation. In this context there is good reason to combine corporate confession with the baptismal service.

This change in general procedure together with Luther's understanding of the continuing significance of baptism are the two greatest influences which have molded the unique rite of baptism in *CW*.

The Uniqueness of the Rite of Baptism in *Christian Worship*

We have set the backdrop and discussed the influences. Now we turn to the rite of baptism in *CW* itself. Is it a good rite of baptism? We have answered that question already: Yes, it is. What about the additions which surround the actual act of baptism? It is in these additions that we find the uniqueness of the rite of baptism in *CW*.

The rite of baptism in *CW* is unique in its attempt to try to bring the sacrament of baptism into the smooth flow of the service. The author of the rite states this as one of the purposes for the additions we find in this rite. In the *Christian Worship: Manual* he states, "The order of *Holy Baptism in Christian Worship* was designed to join the baptism with the regular service in a manner that would achieve a satisfactory integration of the baptism with the liturgies of corporate worship" (p. 165). This is accomplished by eliminating many of the early portions of the rite (exorcisms, anointings, *Ephathas*, exsufflations, etc.) which appear in the ancient liturgies, and the replacing of the early admonitions for baptism which appear in most of the modern liturgies with a corporate confession of sins. In this way the baptism itself is neatly surrounded by the natural flow of the service, avoiding repetition and flowing easily from the rite of baptism to the regular worship liturgy.

The second, and more noteworthy, unique feature of the rite of baptism in *CW* stems from the first. In working out a smooth transition from baptism to the worship liturgy, the author began the baptismal rite with a corporate confession of sins. No other baptismal rite that this author is aware of attempts to do this. Again, the author of the rite in *CW* admits that this was done intentionally when he writes in the *Christian Worship: Manual*:

Not only does God receive as his own the person being baptized, but he continues to assure all believers that they too have been clothed with Christ by baptism. Thus baptism, together with confession and absolution, is also a sacrament of preservation. Not only once, but throughout life, it works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word of God declares. This means that whenever we are sorry for our sins and ask the heavenly Father to forgive us, we are returning to our baptism and making use of it. We are resting our confidence in the security of our baptism, which neither Satan nor sin can tear away from us (p.166).

The same thoughts are expressed in the introduction to "Holy Baptism" in the hymnal itself.

At this point one might recall the insight given by Old in his evaluation of Luther's first translation: "The medieval exorcisms took the place of the prayers of confession and repentance in the earliest Christian baptismal rites. This constituted the *metanoia*, the turning away from the world and toward God. Thus *Luther should have substituted a prayer of repentance or confession of sin for some of these exorcisms*" (Old, p. 37, emphasis added). In the rite of baptism in *CW*, such a substitution has finally taken place. So, too, we recall Luther's understanding of the relationship between baptism and confession. *CW* reflects Luther's understanding by using the very words of Luther's explanation to the fourth part of baptism from the Small Catechism as the admonition to confession. Perhaps it is presumptuous, but this author contends on the basis of Luther's own understanding, that he would have been delighted to see the combination of confession and baptism as it appears in *CW*. The combination of corporate confession and baptism make the rite of baptism in *CW* truly unique.

Conclusion

Our historical examination has revealed the growth and decrease of the baptismal rite. Through the centuries pious Christians have hailed the blessings of baptism with each addition or subtraction. But no rite has done what the rite in *CW* has accomplished. Our study of history has revealed its uniqueness. It is a uniqueness, however, that is not without reason or warrant. Both Lutheran theology and present day circumstances have

influenced this rite and molded its uniqueness. May the blessings God promises in baptism be extolled by this rite today and in the generations to come.

Appendix: Some Brief Critical Evaluations

Although it was not the primary focus of this paper to offer a step-by-step critical analysis of the rite of baptism in *CW*, nevertheless, a thorough study of the rite does lead one to some general observations. I offer these evaluations in no particular order or rank.

The placement of the service at the beginning of the hymnal is sensible. One needs to turn at least 120+ pages into the liturgy section of other Lutheran hymnals before getting to the rite of baptism.

The rite begins with the invocation from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Perhaps it would have been more natural to begin with the general Trinitarian invocation, "In the name of the Father...", since baptism is done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The admonition to confession is filled with scriptural allusions and pictures. The sentence, "Our sinful nature need not control us any longer," could have been worded a little more strongly, for, as Paul tells the Romans, "We know that our old self was *crucified* with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin" (Romans 6:6,7) (emphasis added).

The confession of sins is the same as that found in the Common Service. Perhaps some would accuse *CW* of a lack of creativity, but this author finds comfort in familiarity.

Although it is obvious that the rite strives for brevity, the Great Flood Prayer of Luther could have been added right after the confession and before the admonition at the font. Luther's prayer is delightful and would have added even more to an already scriptural and Lutheran rite.

No questions are asked of the infant, eliminating an awkward situation between pastor and sponsors/witnesses. Nonetheless the simple promises of God are declared to the infant and congregation in faith that God will accomplish what he has promised.

The questions asked of adults are simple and straightforward. There can be no doubt as to the public confession of the person about to be baptized. Gone, however is the renunciation of the devil. Although it is not needed, it has a rich liturgical history and could have been retained without adding much length.

Just before the baptism, the minister is asked to mark the baptized with the sign of the cross as a redeemed "child of Christ." The term "child of Christ" does not reflect any false theology, but it is a term which is not used in Scripture. Perhaps "child of God" would have been a better Scriptural allusion.

The exhortation to the entire congregation, as well as the parents and sponsors, helps the minister out of the uncomfortable position of asking sponsors (witnesses) to answer "yes" to questions they may have no intention, or perhaps, ability to keep. It is also a fine tradition to remind the congregation of their duty to the person baptized as fellow members of Christ's body. It will, however, take both pastor and congregation some time to get used to this exhortation. This author has had a generally weak response during the baptisms he has performed since the question and answer seemed to take the congregation by surprise.

As in all we do, may this rite serve to the glory of God!

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