

ALLIANCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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TH 602

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Part One: The Baptism

Among many forms in the Christian faith, Baptism is considered as the entry point into the church. As it is explained in the article by Copeland, Edwin Luther “For the rightly instructed, discerning Christian the reception of baptism should mean the impressive apprehension of Christian truth by a medium beyond the power of words. The meaning of the Gospel should be ideally impressed upon him as he puts on Christ before an assembled world.’ At the same time his soul is flooded with the memory of his fresh experience of forgiveness, of death to an old life of self-centeredness and sin and resurrection to a new life of Christ-centeredness and righteousness. Moreover, he looks forward in hope to the completion of his redemption in the future resurrection of his body in the likeness of Christ’s resurrection.”¹

The Baptism in the Gospel of John

In the article written by Charles Gieschen, Francis Moloney outlines four criteria for discerning teaching about the sacraments in John, three of which will be summarized here.

First, one should look for language in the text that reflects some form of the sacramental elements or rituals.

Second, one should be aware of the use of a particular text in the sacramental practice, literature, and art of the early church.

Third, one should look for evidence in the text that speaks of the ongoing presence of Jesus through the spirit that can be located and seen.

Before one hears the Nicodemus narrative, one has already learned from this Gospel that Christian baptisms have their source in Jesus who gives the Spirit without measure, the Spirit who abides with the baptized, even as he abides with Jesus.

¹ Edwin Luther Copeland. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: a positive interpretation, 324

1. Baptism as the begetting from above

Those familiar with the Gospel of John know that the Nicodemus narrative (John 3:1-21) is among the most important scriptural testimonies to both the need for "spiritual begetting" due to man's sinful condition of death ("that which is flesh is flesh") and "water and Spirit" baptism as the means through which God accomplishes this "begetting from above."

2. Baptism as Marriage to the Bridegroom.

It is John the Baptist who explicitly identifies Jesus as the bridegroom who has the bride coming to him for cleansing in Baptism: "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom" (John 3:2)

3. Baptism as the Giving of Spiritual Sight.

Another of the signs of Jesus through which John teaches the church about Baptism is the healing of the blind man in John 9:33. This account is about much more than physical sight, which Jesus alludes to immediately before the miracle by declaring "As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the World" (John 9:5).

4. Baptism as Receiving and Believing in the Divine Name

One of the most underappreciated testimonies to Baptism in John's Gospel and Epistles is the teaching about receiving and believing in the unique name that Jesus possesses, primarily because most modern interpreters do not listen to these texts like a first-century Jewish Christian would.²

The Baptism in the Synoptic Gospel

² Gieschen, Charles A. Baptism and the Lord's Supper in the Gospel of John, 23.

All three synoptic Gospels bear witness to Jesus's baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (Matt. 3:1 - 17; Mark 1:1 - 11; Luke 3:1 - 22). According to the Gospel accounts of Matthew and Mark, Jesus "saw" the heavens being split open and the Spirit of God alighting on himself after his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; cf. Luke 3:21). What followed after this visionary revelation was an aural revelation from God the Father: "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:17; cf. Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). The heavenly voice "This is my beloved Son" in Mark 1:11 (cf. Matthew 3:17) does not exactly coincide with "You are my son" in Psalm 2:7 or with "Here is my servant", in whom my soul delights" in Isaiah 42:1³as both verses are missing the key word "beloved." Instead,

The association between Jesus's baptism and Isaac's sacrifice ultimately points to Jesus's sacrifice on the cross as Jesus foretells his own death to his disciples using the language of baptism (Mark 10:38).³

Three positions on the Baptism and their practices in the life of church

In the book "Evangelical Theology" by Michael F. Bird, he lists three different positions on the Baptism.

1. Paedobaptism

The Baptizing of infants is known as Paedobaptism; it is practiced by Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, and Reformed churches. It does not mean that they only baptize infants, for adults may be baptized too; but parents are encouraged to present their children for baptism. Infant baptism functions to initiate children into the new covenant and to incorporate them into the visible church.⁴

³ Hannah S. An, [Reading Matthew's Account of the Baptism and Temptation of Jesus \(Matt. 3:5-4:1\) with the Scapegoat Rite on the Day of Atonement \(Lev. 16:20-22\)](#), 31.

⁴ Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 761.

2. Credobaptism

The Baptism of persons upon a profession of faith is known as “credobaptism”. It is practiced by Anabaptist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Independent, and Free churches. In some cases, they do baptize children, but generally only upon a confession of faith and after questioning by the pastor. The important thing to remember about credobaptism is that it is not so much based on their doctrine of the church. The hub of the credobaptist position is the conviction that the church consists entirely of a regenerate membership. Therefore, since baptism is the means of initiation into the church, they only baptize those who show signs of regeneration and make a profession of faith. Baptism is for believers and is an outward sign of an inward experience.⁵

3. Dual Baptism

A third position is for churches to permit both views of baptism, credo- and paedo-, to be practiced side by side. This policy of ^{dual} baptism is held by the Nazarene Church, American Evangelical Covenant Church, Evangelical Free Church, French Reformed Church, and Presbyterian Church (USA).⁶

These positions effect on the church practice differently.

Reformed:

A Reformed theologian and an articulate defender of infant baptism claims that "The Epistles do not say a great deal about baptism." The Reformed are not really tempted to "sin sacramentally." Their church life can exist without the sacraments and even prosper.

⁵ Ibid, 765.

⁶ Ibid, 768

the sacraments do not belong to the heart of their theology and thus have no real essential place in their church life.

Catholic:

If for the Reformed church life is independent of any sacramental action, for Roman Catholicism the life of the church is subordinated to the sacramental actions. The personal spiritual life of the believer is subordinated to the variety of sacramental actions.⁷

Luther:

Lutherans, of course, have an internal immunization against shelving the sacraments in their popular slogan "word and sacrament," a phrase so much a part of Lutheran theology that it enjoys a stellar ranking of the second magnitude, slightly below the three solas in spite of a general favorable disposition to a sacramentalized worship life, perhaps Lutherans are not as clear in their sacramentology as are the Reformed or Roman Catholics.⁸

Conclusion

Debates about baptism will go on, the focus shouldn't be on the differences, but on the same Triune God, in obedience to Christ, who brought the Gospel into life. Even there are disagreements on the mode, occasion or practice of Baptism, but Christ is the one people get baptized to, not any denomination. Baptism is for believers into unity, not into division, but into Christ, into one Church by one Spirit.

Part Two: The Lord's Supper

⁷ David P. Scaer, *Baptism and the Lord's supper in the life of the church*, 59.

⁸ *Ibid*, 59.

The Lord's Supper has been defined by Bird as "the gospel meal for the gospelizing community. It is the celebration of the new covenant, the new exodus, and our new hope in the Lord Jesus. The Eucharist is essentially remembering Jesus's death, reinscribing the story of Jesus's passion with paschal imagery, restating the promises of the new covenant, rehearsing the victory of Jesus over sin and death, and refocusing our attention towards the Parousia of the Lord Jesus."⁹

The Lord's Supper in the Gospel of John

Contemporary interpretations of the Fourth Gospel take a variety of positions on the presence or absence of sacramental teaching in this gospel. Some scholars have argued for an understanding of many of the events from the life of Jesus as deeply impregnated with a sacramental understanding of God's action in Jesus. Where there is the possibility of sacramental teaching, John implies such teaching. Although John has no explicit report of a final meal and so-called words of institution, there are clear hints in the narrative that the community celebrated Eucharist.¹⁰ In Geisen's article, there are four places need pay more attention on regarding the Lord's Supper:

1. The Feeding of the 5,000

As in the Synoptic Gospels, this miracle became a very important prophetic action in the Gospel of John that foreshadowed the institution of the Lord's Supper as means by which Christ would miraculously feed his church after the resurrection.

2. The Bread of life Discourse: Partaking of the Passover Lamb of God

⁹Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 778.

¹⁰Francis J. Moloney, ['He Loved Them to the End': Eucharist in the Gospel of John](#),⁶⁴.

The Bread of Life discourse, therefore, is about receiving the flesh and blood Jesus in faith. One of the challenges that comes with the lengthy Bread of Life discourse (John 6:25-65) is that interpreters, including Lutheran pastors, tend to see only two clear-cut conclusions: either the discourse is understood as speaking of a metaphorical eating/drinking of Jesus or a Eucharistic eating/drinking of Jesus.

3. The Vine and the Branches as an Exposition of the Last Supper

There are those who say that this discourse, like John 6, is only about abiding in Jesus through faith. Yes, it is about abiding in Jesus through faith. But how does abiding in faith happen? Certainly, it happens through hearing Jesus' word, but also through eating and drinking his Supper.

4. The Meal with the Risen Christ on the Shore

As with the feeding of the 5,000, Christians are to see how this meal teaches them about the ongoing presence of the risen Lord, who now prepares and serves his church with the miraculous food of his flesh and blood.¹¹

The Lord's Supper in Synoptic Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels provide a reliable tradition of the memorable words and actions of Jesus at the Last Supper. A comparison of these four accounts reveals the most notable detail in Matthew's account: Jesus' blood of the new covenant is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. This saying over the cup explains Jesus' death according to Isaiah 53 and Jeremiah 31, while its wording has been influenced by Exodus 24. In the context of Matthew's Gospel, the three themes of prophet, righteous sufferer, and new community anticipate the Last Supper account.

¹¹ Charles A. Gieschen, *Baptism and the Lord's Supper in the Gospel of John*, 45.

The Church has from its inception recognized the Last Supper held by Jesus with his disciples as the model for its own celebration of the Lord's Supper. A number of scholars in recent research understand the Last Supper as offering insight into the significance of Jesus' death. Frederick Dale Bruner calls the Last Supper "tactile Word," for in it is "Jesus' most careful verbal and visual definition of what his death means! N. T. Wright calls it "a deliberate double drama," for Jesus' meal with his disciples "fused the great story of Passover together with another one: the story of Jesus' own life, and of his coming death." The brief narrative, a rich complex of ideas consisting of simple actions and sayings, offers deep insight into how "Jesus saw himself as fulfilling several different Old Testament types simultaneously."¹²

A comparison of the four accounts which record the Last Supper suggests that they contain two traditions concerning the Last Supper: Matthew/Mark and Luke/1 Corinthians. In general, the four accounts share a number of common "constitutive elements" Regarding the setting, the meal occurs in the evening before Judas betrays Jesus but in the prospect of God's kingdom; it also occurs within a Passover setting and anticipates Jesus' death. Regarding the characters, Jesus shares the meal with his disciples but promises a covenant for a multitude of unnamed people who are not present at the meal. Regarding what was done, Jesus takes bread and speaks a blessing; he breaks the bread and gives it to the disciples. He also takes a cup and gives thanks; he gives it to the disciples as well. Regarding what was said, Jesus addresses four statements to the disciples: the word concerning the bread, the word concerning the cup, the command for repetition, and the saying about drinking the fruit of the vine. In all four accounts, the most firmly attested part of the tradition is "this is my body."¹³

¹² Clay Ham, [The last supper in Matthew](#),69.

¹³ Clay Ham, [The last supper in Matthew](#),69.

Jesus makes specific action and interprets the bread for his disciples. He takes bread; he blesses and breaks it. Then, he gives it to his disciples. Following two commands: "Take, eat; this is my body". Jesus identifies his body with the bread.

In the same manner, Jesus acts and speaks in relation to the cup. He takes a cup and gives thanks. Then, he gives it to his disciples. Following the command for all of the disciples to drink from the cup, Jesus identifies his blood with the cup.¹⁴

The Lord's Supper per Apostle Paul

In his article, Seifrid indicated as following:

"Do this in remembrance of me." This self-giving command of Jesus appears in Paul's recounting of the words of institution to the Corinthians, serving his warning to them (1 Cor 11:17-34, esp. w. 24, 25). Jesus's command to "remembrance" may be taken as belonging to the Pauline paradigm (11:23), in which, through both selection and interpretation, the words of institution were made comprehensible for the celebration of the Lord's Supper within Gentile churches. Paul understands the problem in the celebration of the Lord's Supper in Corinth as a problem of the church as a whole. His corporate approach to the issue is clear from his opening withholding of praise and his concluding directives for the community (11:17, 11:33) at the same time, individuals within the church had to ask themselves to what extent they had contributed to this corporate failure. This observation applies to Paul's pointed interpretation of the words of institution, and his following call to self-examination (1 Cor 11:26, 27-29). "Have I despised the church and shamed those who lack?" (11:22). The life of the community and the faith of the individual were coincident and inseparable in this unhappy matter. The Corinthian "forgetting" of the words of institution in its abuse of the Supper is therefore not merely an intellectual

¹⁴ Ibid, 69.

failure, but an act of disobedience of which the church was guilty, both corporately and individually. The Corinthians in their forgetting were guilty of unbelief, an unbelief which corresponds to Israel's idolatry: "You have forgotten the God who made you" (Dt 32:18). Remembering, correspondingly, is an act of faith and obedience that bears both corporate and individual dimensions. Paul's language reflects that of the Scriptures, in which remembering is an actualization of past words or events (whether of God or of Israel), whether it be help and salvation (when God remembers his promises or covenant with the patriarchs), wrath and vengeance (when God remembers sins), or confession, thanksgiving, praise, and obedience (when Israel remembers the Lord). It is unlikely, of course, that churches today will repeat the Corinthian error in its original form. Nevertheless, divisions within the church and maneuvering for status and power have not ended. That these actions take place outside of the celebration of the Lord's Supper does not diminish their seriousness. We, too, are tempted to idolatrous "forgetting" of Jesus's words. Are contemporary "worship wars" all that far removed from the problem in Corinth? The church stands and must stand at the foot of the cross, where the ground is entirely level, no matter what our gifts and office might be. The Lord's Supper is Jesus's reminder that this truth is to be present and visible among us, especially in our worship and our celebration of the Lord's Supper.¹⁵

McGowan illustrated his point on it like this: Paul's use of the phrase "Lord's supper" and the retelling of the "institution narrative" combine to demonstrate how a banquet celebrated by Christians might be comparable in form to some other meals but might have a radically different ethos. While distinctive in character and power for the participants as a sharing in the blood and body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16), the Christian was in other respects still recognizably a banquet among other banquets—it was "the Lord's," not so much because of peculiar foods,

¹⁵ Mark Seifrid, [Gift of remembrance: Paul and the Lord's Supper in Corinth](#), 129.

quantities, procedures but because of the participants, their divine host, and the words and actions that characterized him and those incorporated into him (v. 29) So Paul's use of the term "Lord's supper" in reference to the Corinthian banquet is powerful and interesting; but to be an actual name for the Christian meal, rather than a meaningful phrase connected with an ephemeral rhetorical contrast, it would have to have some history, previous or subsequent.¹⁶

Different views on the Lord's Supper and their practice in the life of church

As we know, Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper was not shared by all Reformers. While for him, the idea of the Mass as an offering was excluded by Christ's effective word of promise, Luther's colleague in Wittenberg Andreas Karlstadt avoided the sacrificial understanding by limiting Christ's command, "Do this in remembrance of me" to a recollection of the past event of salvation. The Swiss Reformers Ulrich Zwingli and Johannes Oecolampadius, following Augustine's distinction between *res* and *signum*, likewise understood Christ's command of remembrance to signal the distance of Christ's saving work from the communicant. Despite varying emphasis and argument, all three of them understood remembrance as the actualization of the past event of salvation by the communicant and the believing community. They differed from the Roman church in their thinking that completed salvation was the object of the recollection. Nevertheless, they shared in the traditional conception of the Supper in that they understood remembrance as the actualization of the past through reflection on its significance. The focus of the remembrance was again the saving event of the passion of Christ, with its effects, and not the Christ of the passion himself.¹⁷

¹⁶ Andrew Brian McGowan, [The myth of the 'Lord's Supper': Paul's Eucharistic meal terminology and Its ancient reception](#), 521.

¹⁷ Mark Seifrid, [Gift of remembrance: Paul and the Lord's Supper in Corinth](#), 129.

Conclusion

Billings in his article concluded as this: The Lord's Supper, as a God-given means of grace, has implications for the church's public witness. Rather than separate bodies from souls, and the secular from the sacred, the Supper holds together union with the heavenly Christ and communion with earthly bodies. Moreover, while union with Christ at the Supper is God's gift, this gift exposes the sinful inadequacy of the church's witness. In the eschatological tension between present gift and future promise, the Supper enacts the church's identity as a people empowered to live into God's promise in its public life, while avoiding both triumphalism and mere capitulation to social-political trends.¹⁸

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