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CORPORATE WORSHIP AS IMPROVING BAPTISM: PRACTICES TOWARD THE NEW IDENTITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

By

LUKE W. BRODINE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF
COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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Dr. Mark Dalbey, Faculty Advisor Mark Z. Dalbey

Dr. C. John Collins, Second Faculty Reader C. John Collins

Dr. Phil Douglass, Director of D.Min. Program Philip D. Douglass

Abstract

Baptism, as the one event experienced by all Christians, is the starting point for Christian identity. Literature suggests that there is a fundamental connection between baptism and ongoing spiritual formation. In order to take advantage of the benefits of baptism, pastors must recognize how baptismal practices impart theological understanding and shape identity.

This study explored how pastors' conduct of corporate worship services helps congregants connect the practice of baptism to the pursuit of spiritual formation. Four research questions guided this study: (1) How do pastors describe the role baptism plays in the process of spiritual formation? (2) How do pastors understand the interaction between the theology and the practices of baptism in the lives of their congregants? (3) How do pastors foster baptismal formation in their congregants (a) while preparing for baptism, and (b) in the years following baptism? (4) What outcomes do pastors desire to observe in congregants engaged in baptismal formation? The study employed qualitative research methods and used a semi-structured protocol to interview six demographically diverse pastors.

The analysis of biblical and historical literature revealed various connections between baptism and identity. The data analysis showed the relationship between practices and narrative in the process of identity formation, as well as the role communities play in individual spiritual formation.

The study provided four conclusions on the themes of baptism and spiritual formation. First, narrative is a key instrument uniting baptismal practice with identity formation. Second, baptism relies on both pedagogical and experiential practices to

convey its meaning. Third, baptismal formation is fostered in the context of community and corporate worship. Fourth, the Westminster Larger Catechism wisely lays out the nuances of the human response to God's gracious actions signed and sealed in baptism.

To Sarah, Nealon, and Eben

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Abbreviations

BCO	Book of Church Order (PCA)
BCP	Book of Common Prayer
BCW	Book of Common Worship
BEM	*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*
DPW	Directory for the Public Worship of God
Institutes	*Institutes of the Christian Religion*
NIV	New International Version
WCC	World Council of Churches
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism

Chapter 1

Introduction

"When most of a congregation has experienced baptism as unwitting babies, it goes against the grain to regard baptism as a major defining feature of its common Christian identity."[1] These are strong words from the late David Wright, a Scottish Presbyterian elder and theologian of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Despite theological and denominational convictions that otherwise aligned with the practice of infant baptism, much of Wright's later writings addressed the drawbacks of infant baptism in the Christian Church at large. In the title of one of his last monographs, Wright provocatively asks: *What Has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism?*[2]

Regardless of whether infant baptism has played a role in the systematic devaluing of baptism as a whole in many congregations, the practice itself is a highly debated element of Christianity. How churches talk about their practices is an important marker for how they define those practices, and these practices are essential to their understanding of Christian growth. This is summed up in the axiom used within some circles of the church: *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, or "The rule of prayer is the rule of belief." As worship scholar Constance Cherry puts it: "We pray (engage in the whole liturgy) only to find that we come to believe that which we are speaking and doing

[1] David F. Wright, "The Baptismal Community," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160, no. 637 (2003): 4.

[2] David F. Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism? An Enquiry at the End of Christendom* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005).

through worship."[3] Applied to the purposes of this study, the manner in which churches practice baptism informs and shapes the beliefs of their congregants regarding baptism.

In Scripture and creeds, Christians confess that baptism is a unifying aspect of the Church.[4] However, there is wide disagreement over the meaning and practice of baptism.[5] Is it possible—or even desirable—for all denominations to come to a consensus on baptism?

The World Council of Churches, an ecumenical gathering convened during the mid-twentieth century, represented one recent attempt to create such unity. In 1982, the Council produced a seminal document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. Rather than exhaustively describing the theology of baptism, this publication concentrates on "those aspects of the theme that have been directly or indirectly related to the problems of mutual recognition leading to unity" between churches.[6] According to BEM, when churches are unable to achieve a degree of unity concerning baptism, it gives "dramatic visibility to the broken witness of the Church" and the mission of the Church suffers.[7] However, the writers believe that attaining baptismal unity will demonstrate to the world

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[3] Constance M. Cherry, *The Special Service Worship Architect: Blueprints for Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms, Holy Communion, and Other Occasions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 25.

[4] 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27-28. The Nicene Creed professes "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins." Indeed, "the liturgical use of creeds originates precisely in the baptismal liturgies of the early centuries . . . In churches that do not use creeds, a personal profession of faith replaces the more formal creeds, but . . . must be consonant with the beliefs of the community." Paul Meyendorff, "Toward Mutual Recognition of Baptism," in *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, ed. Thomas F. Best (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 201.

[5] The last century has witnessed an endless stream of publications going back and forth over the issue of infant baptism and believer's baptism. One recent example is Thomas R. Schreiner, Shawn D. Wright, and E. Ray Clendenen, eds., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), which in many ways is a direct response to the arguments presented in Gregg Strawbridge, ed., *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003).

[6] World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), vii.

[7] Ibid., 2.

an authentic cooperation among the churches.

Divisions over the theology of baptism span the history of the Church. As early as the third century, Christians have argued about who can perform baptisms, who can receive baptism, and what is the proper mode of applying water.[8] Despite the seemingly surface nature of these debates, they reflect important elements of belief concerning not only the meaning of baptism but also the entire Christian life and the nature of the Church. These controversies center on the nature of baptism as a rite of initiation into the Christian life and the Christian community.

However, over the centuries, groups have attempted to create some form of unity in theology and practice. One such group, the Westminster Assembly, convened during the mid-seventeenth century, published the Westminster Confession of Faith and a handful of accompanying documents.[9] The WCF offers helpful definitions of baptism distilled from the full witness of the Bible: namely, the rite of baptism unites us with Christ in his baptism and with the Church, his visible body;[10] and baptism with water is a one-time act, yet it has ongoing effects upon the life of the baptized.[11]

The corresponding section from the WLC gives direction on how Christians are to live in light of their baptisms.[12] After addressing the questions "What is baptism?" and

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[8] One of these early controversies concerned Novationism, which questioned the validity of baptisms performed by heretics and schismatics. A similar controversy arose in the fourth century around Donatism, which questioned baptisms performed by *traditores* who capitulated during Roman persecution. Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 380-399, 795-803.

[9] David Dickson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990).

[10] WCF 28.1.

[11] WCF 28.7.

[12] "In an age that cries out for relevant preaching and practical application, the Larger Catechism stands as a goldmine. . . . Its teaching on the effective use of the means of grace is particularly helpful in guarding us

"Unto whom is baptism to be administered?" the WLC asks, "How is our baptism to be improved by us?"[13] Claiming that improving baptism is a "much neglected duty," the Catechism then provides a comprehensive description of what it means for Christians to live in light of the promises of baptism.[14]

To modern readers, who generally define "to improve" as "to make (something) better,"[15] the notion of improving our baptism seem may strange. And if this were the meaning of "improve" intended by Westminster, then one could construe that something is lacking initially in the effectiveness of baptism. The WCF clarifies the issue of the full efficacy of baptism, stating, "By the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost."[16] Presbyterian theologian Mark Ross points out a nuanced usage of "improve" in seventeenth-century English: delegates to the Westminster Assembly would have understood "improve" as a directive to not allow property "to lie waste, but . . . put to good use, and turned to one's

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against mere ritualism in public worship, and guiding us toward a faithful and fruitful participation in the divine ordinances appointed for our spiritual nourishment and growth." Mark E. Ross, "Improving the Means of Grace: The Larger Catechism on Spiritual Growth," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2003), 3:415.

[13] WLC 165-167. For the full text of these catechism questions and answers, see Appendix A.

[14] "The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body." WLC 167.

[15] Merriam-Webster, "Improve," Merriam-Webster.com, 2015, accessed March 11, 2015, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/improve.

[16] WCF 28.6.

advantage."[17] Ross illustrates this principle with the example of a 1632 ordinance regarding the use of a property whose "deed shall become void" if the land is not improved and left fallow.[18] In a similar way, the efficacy of baptism is not to be improved; rather, baptism is improved when one takes advantage of the benefits conferred through baptism.

In light of the efficacy of baptism, WLC 167 presents a substantial road map for living out the Christian life that draws upon the promises of baptism. "Engaging every action offered" takes constant focus on and requires a recollection of baptism, which appears to be the intent of the authors. Baptism lived out in this way would become the identity-making act of the Christian life, embodied by the new name given at baptism.[19] Completing a program like this would span the whole of the Christian life and would require the resources of the entire community of the church. But are churches offering opportunities to their baptized members (children included) to learn what it looks like to "grow up" into their baptisms?

For many reasons, baptism has lost its central importance in churches today. Denominational affiliations typically define a congregation's identity by what distinguishes them from other congregations: Reformed churches are defined by the theology and practices of the Reformers that developed in response to the Medieval Church; Presbyterians are defined by a specific form of church government different from episcopal and congregational forms; Baptist churches are defined by the practice of "believer only" baptism in contrast to other denominations which practice infant baptism.

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[17] Ross, 422.

[18] Ibid.

[19] WCF 28.2.

By nature of the name, this latter group couches its identity in baptism, though it may be said that it is this specific view of baptism that defines their communities, rather than the meaning of baptism itself.[20]

As with any organization, congregations seek something on which to base their group identity. Wright advocates basing the Church's identity on baptism: "It would be far truer to the apostolic testimony to portray the church as a baptismal community than as a eucharistic community, as it is commonly called today."[21] The identity of the church as it is found in the New Testament is based upon baptism. This is not to say that churches should do away with denominations altogether in favor of a singular baptismal practice, but rather the centrality of baptism should shape each denomination's core identity despite differences in practice with other denominations.[22]

Some confusion over baptism springs from the disagreement over whether God or humans are the primary actors. When baptism is performed as an act of obedience, it reveals a human-oriented perspective held by those who would classify baptism and communion as ordinances.[23] The term "ordinance" dates back to Reformation debates over the nature of what were then called sacraments. The term "sacrament" comes from

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[20] "Despite the unity of namesake that they enjoy, Baptists are not of one mind regarding the meaning of the sacred practices that they share with other Christian churches." Stanley J. Grenz, "Baptism and the Lord's Supper as Community Acts: Toward a Sacramental Understanding of the Ordinances," in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 76.

[21] David F. Wright, "Baptism at the Westminster Assembly," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2003), 1:162.

[22] "I am much more interested in the different baptismal traditions each recovering in their own terms the centrality of baptism to the existence and identity of their several churches than in their coming to an agreement on practice." David F. Wright, "Christian Baptism: Where Do We Go from Here?," *Evangelical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (2006): 166.

[23] Cherry, 23.

the Latin *sacramentum*, an oath taken by troops to not desert their post; it has been associated with the practices of the Church since the fourth century. Up through the Medieval Church, a theology of sacraments developed in which they took on a magical or superstitious character. It was taught that the sacraments themselves were the vessels of grace. Then, as today, the Roman Catholic Church performed seven sacraments. The Protestant Reformation rejected this number and returned to the two sacraments instituted by Jesus during his ministry: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

One of the Reformers' objections to the Medieval sacramental system was the superstitious elements applied to their practices. Reformers like Luther and Calvin preserved the term "sacrament" while seeking to clarify its meaning. Others rejected the terminology altogether because of its ties to the Roman sacramental system, and began referring to these practices as "ordinances"—ordained by Christ. The WCF applies the term "ordinance" to the practices "in which [God's] covenant is dispensed"; they include "the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments."[24] Here, ordinances—including the sacraments—flow from God's action, yet require the work of the church to administer them to his people.[25]

For those who opt for the language of ordinance over and against sacrament, a specific meaning of baptism and communion is applied. Baptist theologian Stanley Grenz notes that those who prefer the term "ordinance" favor a particular theology of baptism and the Lord's Supper. These ordinances are performed out of obedience to Christ, who

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[24] WCF 7.6.

[25] In the accompanying document DPW, the term ordinance is used in an even broader sense, including the assembling for worship, the prayers, marriage, and the singing of Psalms. Dickson, 369.

ordained these actions.[26] He concludes: "Because they are signs of obedience, the rites are basically human, and not divine acts. Rather than God's imparting grace to the communicant through the act, an ordinance provides occasion for the participant to bear testimony to the spiritual truths symbolized in it."[27] As an act of obedience, the focus of baptism shifts away from the giver of baptism and toward the recipient.

Discarding "sacrament"—with its worrisome connotations—in favor of the term "ordinance" may help generalize church practices across denominational traditions and definitions. However, Grenz laments that because of the influence of the Enlightenment, the usage of ordinance has caused "a marked devaluing" of baptism in theology and practice; churches "view this act as having no real importance beyond serving as a personal statement of faith."[28] Grenz is a Baptist theologian, and he does not reject Baptistic theologies of baptism. However, he does see that there is something inherent to the labels applied to ordinances that influences the way in which they are practiced—and that, in turn, influences the way the rest of the Christian life is practiced. He advocates for a reclaiming of baptism as a rite of the church rather than the "individualistic outlook" that has taken hold.[29]

Baptism is increasingly being understood from a perspective of self-reliance, and this shift is actually being experienced on both sides of the debate. According to Biblical Studies scholar Robbie Castleman, the meaning of baptism has turned away from the

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[26] Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 514.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Grenz, "Baptism and the Lord's Supper as Community Acts: Toward a Sacramental Understanding of the Ordinances," in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 83.

[29] Ibid., 84.

bigger story as it has been variously practiced over time.[30] She observes that we find our identity as individuals and communities through story. Recovering "God's great story," as Castleman puts it, counteracts the devaluation of baptism and attests to God's work in salvation. New Testament scholar James Brownson confirms the emphasis on community as an important baptismal theme that needs to be "rediscovered" for the sake of countering "an increasingly individualistic society."[31]

Rather than calling for the abandonment of personal narratives, baptism offers a new identity and a means by which recipients can interpret their personal narratives in light of God's great story. Grenz states: "Our sense of personal identity develops as we tell our narrative . . . but our personal stories are never isolated units. They are touched by the stories of other persons and ultimately the story of a larger people of which we are a part. Our narratives, therefore, are always embedded in the story of the community in which we participate."[32] The grand narrative is learned by participation in the community of God, a community set apart through baptism. Theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas observes that participation in the sacraments serves as an entrance into the story: "The sacraments enact the story of Jesus and, thus, form a community in his image. We could not be the church without them. For the story of Jesus is not simply one that is

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[30] "The church's longstanding struggle concerning believer's baptism and paedobaptism [infant baptism] is evidence of what can happen when story and sign are disconnected. Paedobaptism can become a rite of superstition or family tradition, and believer's baptism can become a heartfelt but essentially self-dependent effort to 'get right with God.' In both cases the reality of God's salvation is lost in the shadowy darkness of our own small story and concerns." Robbie Castleman, *Story-Shaped Worship: Following Patterns from the Bible and History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 158.

[31] James Brownson, *The Promise of Baptism: An Introduction to Baptism in Scripture and the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), xiii.

[32] Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 425.

told: it must be enacted."[33] By practicing the sacraments, Christians participate in the story of Jesus. Hauerwas goes on to say: "Through baptism we do not simply learn the story, but we become part of that story."[34] Baptism unites Christians with the story of redemption found in Christ. But good practices are not always going to convey the intended belief. Countering Cherry's point earlier concerning *lex orandi, lex credendi*, pastor and theologian Paul Miller points out that practices may, in fact, fail to be truly Christian: "There is nothing inherently Christian in the notion of a practice. The theological challenge in any contemporary account of practices is to demonstrate that the identity to which these practices contribute is Christian in some meaningful sense."[35] Practices fail to be Christian practices if they are not connected to a Christian meaning. Miller points to narrative as the "crucial element" for connecting practice with meaning.[36]

Just as narrative is fundamental to giving meaning to practices, baptism is fundamental to participation in the narrative of God's great story. Yet, how should baptism be understood as a Christian practice? In their essay "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," practical and educational theologians Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass present twelve Christian practices to grow in the Christian life.[37] However, baptism is conspicuously absent from this list. The authors address this omission later in their essay: "At its heart, baptism is not so much a distinct practice as it

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[33] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 107-108.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Paul Miller, "A Theory of Christian Practices," *Touchstone* 30, no. 2 (2013): 15.

[36] Ibid., 16.

[37] Craig R. Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

is the liturgical summation of all the Christian practices. . . . Unlike each particular practice, baptism does not address a specific need; instead, it ritually sketches the contours of a whole new life, within which all human needs can be perceived in a different way."[38] Baptism is the all-encompassing Christian practice, the one from which all others flow. In a way, to experience one's baptism fully, one must be immersed in the gamut of Christian practices.

In his discussion of the Westminster Assembly, historical theologian Robert Letham draws a similar conclusion about the all-encompassing nature of baptism as a practice:

> It is not the case that baptism simply offers or demonstrates the grace of God, which is then received by the one baptized. Nor is it merely the fact that baptism is a visible demonstration of the gospel, setting forth washing from sins, death, and resurrection to newness of life. It is, of course, both of these things. However, it is something more. In baptism, the promised grace—regeneration, remission of sins, sanctification, and above all union with Christ—is conferred by the Holy Spirit.[39]

The Holy Spirit imparts the basis of the Christian life through baptism, which not only points to the coming of the work of the Spirit, but is inseparably connected to it. Specifically referencing "improving our baptism," Letham notes that the Christian life is enabled by the work of the Spirit and is itself a response to that work. Baptism is the chosen means for the Spirit to empower the work of the Christian life based upon the promises contained within the sacrament.[40]

Worship scholar Byron Anderson describes liturgical practices as enabling a

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[38] Ibid., 30-31.

[39] Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 2009), 346.

[40] Ibid., 347.

"catechesis of the self," where not only the teaching about a liturgical practice is important for spiritual formation, but where the liturgical practice itself is formational. This understanding "challenges the dominant Western ethos of worship as a private act done in a corporate setting."[41] Liturgical practices are communal actions that shape a community. Anderson claims that baptismal practices function in the formation of an identity that goes beyond the personal initiation of recipients—it also extends into the future of what they are becoming. The degree to which baptism is applied as a shared story is dependent on each congregation's particular practices and theologies.[42] Anderson concludes that distinct liturgical practices allow congregations to make the grammar and narrative of theology their own.[43]

In practicing baptism, Christians assimilate not only its meaning but also other aspects of Christian theology. Christian educator Gordon Mikoski draws the relationship between baptism and understanding the Trinity. As a theological construct, the Trinity is an abstract concept that is difficult to apply to Christian living. Mikoski states that baptism grounds the formation of Christian identity in the Trinity as a "concrete, bodily practice necessarily associated with the formation of Christian beliefs and practices."[44] Developing an understanding of the Trinity is necessary to Christian identity formation. For Mikoski, baptism creates a concrete connection between the Trinity and pedagogy because it is a practice necessary for initiating Christian identity founded on the

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[41] E. Byron Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity: Practicing Ourselves* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 192.

[42] Ibid., 167.

[43] Ibid., 192.

[44] Gordon S. Mikoski, *Baptism and Christian Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 67.

relationship established with Trinity.[45]

Worship theologian Karen Westerfield Tucker advocates for a lifelong process of spiritual formation connected to baptism. She notes the need for better processes in churches' pre-baptismal formation in order to train leaders, new converts, and the parents of children receiving baptism. She believes this would aid churches in recognizing baptisms from across denominational lines.[46] Christian initiation, of which baptism is a part, is a "comprehensive process" and should be practiced as such in order to lay the groundwork for developing an encompassing, life-long Christian identity for congregations and individuals.[47] She goes on to note that post-baptismal formation is important to prepare for bodily death and the promise of resurrection.

Problem Statement

In light of these dilemmas over the theology and practice of baptism, churches are faced with the challenge of helping their congregants "improve their baptism." How might congregations better apply the meanings and practices of baptism? Is this a valid approach to considering Christian living, and what is at stake if churches fail to do so? What can church leaders do in order to aid their congregations in putting the promises of baptism to good use throughout their communities, and what lasting benefits for individuals and communities might result from taking such approaches?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors' conduct of corporate

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, "Convergence and Divergence: Baptism Today," in *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, ed. Thomas F. Best (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 214.

[47] Ibid., 218.

worship services helps congregants connect the practice of baptism to the pursuit of spiritual formation.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research:

1. How do pastors describe the role baptism plays in the process of spiritual formation?
2. How do pastors understand the interaction between the theology and the practices of baptism in the lives of their congregants?
3. What steps do pastors take to foster baptismal formation in their congregants
    a. while preparing for baptism?
    b. in the years following baptism?
4. What outcomes do pastors desire to observe in congregants engaged in baptismal formation?

Significance of the Study

First, church leaders engaged in planning worship services—whether pastors or musicians—will benefit from learning how practice informs belief. It is important to be mindful of how baptismal liturgy can shape and reflect a congregation's theology of baptism. This includes choosing certain prayers, and placing the rite of baptism either before or after the sermon. In addition, the diverse meanings of baptism may be woven into the worship life of the community. Songwriters and artists can draw on the rich and varied imagery of baptism when crafting songs and other works of art for congregations.

Second, this study will prompt pastors and other church leaders to consider how they teach their congregations to apply the promises of their baptism to daily living. In

the context of worship, a pastor may draw out the meaning of baptism within a sermon text or in regard to a corporate prayer of confession. In counseling situations, a Christian counselor can direct church members to seek assurance from the promises of their baptism. Leaders may also draw on baptism to strengthen the shared beliefs of their community as they live out the mission of the church in unity. Church planters, a subset of this group, are in a unique position to shape baptismal practices early in the development of their congregations. A church plant may have a higher incidence of conversion baptism at the start of its ministry, allowing the congregation to witness frequent baptisms.[48] Moreover, many decisions regarding worship practices in church plants are not as bound to the traditions that are inherent to established congregations, allowing church planters freedom from the start to implement formative and lasting practices.

Finally, this study is of vital importance to the laity. A believer generally experiences baptism once in his or her life (except in cases of rebaptism). It may be difficult to reflect on that experience, no matter if he or she was baptized as an adult or as an infant. This study will help baptized believers to better understand and apply the promises of their baptism as they grow in the Christian faith. It will also prompt parents of baptized children to reflect on how to raise their children up to understand the promises of their baptism.

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[48] "We see more baptisms as more congregations are planted and more laypeople are unleashed. We know that the average new church is five times more effective in reaching people than established churches. The average Southern Baptist church, 10 years old or older, averages 2.5 baptisms per 100 resident members. A Southern Baptist church 10 years old or younger averages 10.8 baptisms per 100 resident members. I believe equipped, empowered, and deployed people are at the heart of this equation. Newer churches tend to depend more on laypeople to do the ministry. The older the church the more the church tends to depend on paid staff to do ministry." Richard H. Harris, *Reaching a Nation through Church Planting*, 3rd ed. (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, SBC, 2005), 18.

Definition of Terms

Baptism – There are two types of baptism described in the New Testament: baptism with water and baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Physical baptism is the outward sign of what is happening spiritually through the work of the Holy Spirit.[49] This study concerns the practice of baptism as it takes place in the visible church, so for brevity, all references to baptism will imply water baptism. When speaking of "Spirit baptism," the study will refer to it as such.

Baptismal formation – As noted above by Westerfield Tucker, the Christian life is influenced by the practices of both pre- and post-baptismal formation that may take place in congregations. While one is concerned with preparing before baptism and the other is concerned with maturing following baptism, the two are inseparably linked to the formation of Christian identity. Rather than attempting to differentiate the nuances of each, both elements will be treated with the singular term "baptismal formation" in order to preserve this linkage.

Sacrament – Sacrament are means of grace performed by the church as "signs and seals of the covenant of grace."[50] This study is written from the perspective of the Protestant church, which holds to two sacraments ordained by Jesus during his earthly ministry: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This emphasis on the means Christ ordained has created some confusion in terminology in American churches. Baptist churches refer to them as "ordinances" rather than "sacraments." The background and effects of this shift in terms has been addressed above; however, it is worth noting here that "sacraments" may be

[49] WCF 28.6.

[50] WCF 27.1.

viewed as interchangeable with "ordinances," depending on the reader's perspective.

Believer's baptism – Also referred to as the Credobaptist perspective. Segments of the Christian Church view baptism as applying to professing believers only, and not to other members of their household.

Infant baptism – Also known as the Paedobaptist perspective. Segments of the Christian Church view baptism as applying both to professing believers and the children of professing believers. Paedobaptists also practice believer's baptism on profession of faith for those who were not baptized as infants.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors' conduct of corporate worship services helps congregants connect the practice of baptism to the pursuit of spiritual formation.

Biblical Theology of Baptism

The study will consider the meaning and practices of baptism developed throughout the Bible. Instead of presenting a comprehensive analysis of all biblical references to baptism, this chapter will focus on those passages foundational for understanding baptism today. It will examine how scholars address the promises of God administered through covenantal signs, the understanding of baptism developed in the four Gospels, the practices of the early church as described in the Acts of the Apostles, and the meaning of baptism elaborated in the Epistles. Issues that these interpreters debate include the mode of applying water in baptism, the relationship between water and spirit baptism, and the proper recipients of baptism.

Baptism and Covenant

One question still debated today is whether infants may receive baptism in addition to adults. Many paedobaptists support their practice using covenant theology, a defense that was established in the sixteenth century during the Protestant Reformation.[51]

[51] See for example John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 4.16; John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 1980); Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Children of Promise: The Case of Baptizing Infants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979); Strawbridge, ed., *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism.*

In critiquing these arguments for paedobaptism, biblical scholar Stephen Wellum concludes: "The baptismal question is a major test-case for one's entire theological system since it tells much about how one puts the entire canon together."[52] Wellum claims that how one interprets the meaning of baptism and its role in redemptive history determines one's approach to all of God's promises explained in the revelation of His Word. With Wellum's premise in mind, this study begins by examining how God relates to humanity through a series of interrelated covenants developed across the entire Bible.

At creation, God established a relationship with Adam and Eve by means of a covenant. Even after this first covenant was broken in the Fall, God continued to relate to humanity through covenants.[53] When He established a relationship with Abraham, God promised him descendants and a land in which they would live,[54] and he introduced circumcision as the sign of his covenant to bless the nations through Abraham and his offspring.[55] Circumcision confirmed the identity of God's people in the midst of the nations.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul called circumcision "a seal of the righteousness that [Abraham] had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."[56] Circumcision was the external sign representing the spiritual reality of Abraham's faith. Later, in his letter to the Colossians, Paul pointed out that Christ had metaphorically

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[52] Stephen Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner, Shawn D. Wright, and E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), 160.

[53] Gen. 3:15.

[54] Gen. 15:1-21.

[55] Gen. 17:1-14.

[56] Rom. 4:11.

circumcised those who were "buried with him in baptism," thus emphasizing the connection of the spiritual realities represented in both circumcision and baptism.[57]

Presbyterian theologian John Murray makes three points about the relationship between circumcision and the covenant.[58] First, circumcision was the covenantal seal of union and communion with God.[59] Second, circumcision demonstrated the removal of defilement, a concept that was developed throughout the Old Testament, notably in the image of circumcision of the heart.[60] Third, as Paul makes clear in the New Testament, circumcision was the sign of the faith Abraham had already possessed even before the ritual was performed.[61] Murray's reading of circumcision emphasizes the spiritual realities of the covenant and not merely Israel's national identity. He finds continuity between the covenants over the course of Scripture, and claims that baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant.[62]

In contrast, Wellum advocates reading the Old Testament promises—namely the Abrahamic covenant—in the context of the progression of covenant relationships that started with Adam and ended with Christ's fulfillment.[63] Generally, paedobaptists argue for a single Covenant of Grace in which all biblical covenants are contained; however,

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[57] Col. 2:11-12.

[58] Murray, 46-48.

[59] Gen. 17:1-14.

[60] Exod. 6:12,30; Lev. 19:23; 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 6:10; 9:25; Ezek. 28:10; 31:18; 32:19-32.

[61] Rom. 4:11; Col. 2:11,12; Rom. 2:25-29; Phil. 3:3.

[62] Murray, 48-50. Other authors that share Murray's views include Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.24; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 1980), 147-166; Mark E. Ross, "Baptism and Circumcision as Signs and Seals," in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003), 85-111.

[63] Wellum, 127-137.

Wellum describes this as "reductionism," a flattening of the plurality of covenants as spoken of in Scripture, and "reducing it primarily to *spiritual* realities while neglecting its national and typological aspects."[64] As the Mosaic and Davidic covenants were instituted, these national and typological aspects were integrated.

New Testament scholar George Beasley-Murray also challenges Murray's tendency to emphasize continuities and downplay the discontinuities between the covenants.[65] Beasley-Murray contends that circumcision of the heart is different from physical circumcision. Therefore, even though circumcision and baptism share a spiritual reality, it is wrong to infer that the practice of infant circumcision is continued in infant baptism.

It is clear that the covenants define the terms of God's relationship with His people. However, it has yet to be established how the covenants are to be understood in relationship to Christ. If there primarily is continuity before and after Christ, then there is a parallel between circumcision and baptism. If, instead, there primarily is discontinuity, then the signs of circumcision and baptism are not to be equated. With this perspective in mind, this study turns from the Old Testament to the New Testament in order to understand various approaches to the theology of baptism.

New Testament

In *Troubled Waters*, New Testament scholar Ben Witherington observes: "One surprise in studying the New Testament teaching on water baptism is the paucity of

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[64] Ibid., 126-128. Emphasis in original.

[65] George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 334-344.

material dealing directly with the matter."[66] Similarly, theologian Leonard Vander Zee states, "The New Testament writers themselves [did] not offer a coherent explanation of baptism. They assume[d] its practice and importance. They describe[d] baptisms and correct[ed] mistaken notions about it. They ascribe[d] a number of meanings to baptism."[67] Consequently, this study looks at a variety of passages to identify the meanings and practices of baptism.

The Four Gospels

Each of the Evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—addressed issues pertaining to baptism in their descriptions of the ministry of John the Baptist and his baptism of Jesus. They also made both direct and indirect references to those baptisms that Jesus performed during his ministry. Scholars disagree over the degree to which these passages should be employed in understanding Christian baptism today. This section will address the debates over significant Gospel passages referencing baptism.

The Baptism of John

In his ministry at the River Jordan, John the Baptist called people to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."[68] In this way, he fulfilled Old Testament prophecies of the one who would prepare the way for the Lord.[69]

It is important to place John's baptisms in the context of Jewish proselyte

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[66] Ben Witherington, III, *Troubled Waters: The Real New Testament Theology of Baptism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 7.

[67] Leonard J. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 77-78.

[68] Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:2-8; Luke 3:1-17; John 1:6-7,19-28.

[69] These prophecies include Isaiah 40:3 (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23) and Malachi 3:1 (Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2), as well as Malachi 4:5-6 concerning one who comes in the spirit of Elijah (Matt. 11:13-14; 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17; John 1:20-21).

baptisms. Considered unclean, Gentile converts were required to undergo baptism by immersion in order to be accepted as part of the Jewish religious; like John's, these baptisms were both purificatory and initiatory.[70] In addition, both were grounded in Old Testament ritual cleansing laws.[71]

However, John's baptisms diverged in notable ways from both proselyte baptism and ritual washings. While these were self-administered and repeated rituals, John administered baptism to others and did so only once. Jewish proselytes washed indoors with stored water, whereas John baptized in the flowing waters of the Jordan. Finally, proselyte baptism applied to Gentile converts while John's baptism applied to Jews.[72]

While it is helpful to understand the Jewish practices that were connected to baptism in the New Testament, the meaning and practice of Christian baptism should be drawn from John's and Jesus' baptisms rather than from their antecedents. Rather than simply continuing proselyte baptism, New Testament scholar Oscar Cullmann notes, "[John] introduced the revolutionary and—in Jewish eyes—scandalous innovation, that he demanded this baptism not only from heathen but from all circumcised Jews on reception into the messianic fellowship."[73] Thus, John's baptisms marked a transition from these other acts toward a new Christian baptism. Moreover, John's administering these baptisms to others signified a major divergence from proselyte baptism, suggesting,

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[70] Ferguson, 79.

[71] Lev. 11-17; Num. 19:11-22.

[72] Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Baptism in the Gospels," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner, Shawn D. Wright, and E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), 12.

[73] Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 62.

as historian Everett Ferguson claims, "that one cannot effect one's own cleansing."[74] Receiving rather than performing baptism emphasized the need for an outside actor in the process of purification.

There is no description of how this baptism was administered, other than with water "in (εἰς) the Jordan."[75] John was baptizing in the river and not simply on its banks, as demonstrated when Jesus "came up (ἀναβαίνω) out of (ἐκ) the water" after his baptism.[76] This description can imply varying degrees of immersion depending on the depth of the water—which, in turn, has led to scholarly debates over the practice of immersion. New Testament scholar Andreas Köstenberger states that, "Evidence from the Gospels suggests that [immersion] was in fact the NT and early church's mode of baptism."[77] In contrast, Reformed theologian James Brownson states, "Curiously, there is only one New Testament reference to being baptized 'into' water . . . One might expect more such usages, if 'dip' or 'plunge' was always the assumed meaning of the Greek word *baptizō*."[78] According to Baptist theologian Daniel Block, Mark 1:10 implies that John's baptism was administered by immersion, but Block allows that "it is also possible that the baptizer used a pitcher or cupped his hands and dipped them into the water and released the water over the person's head."[79] Ultimately, however, the Gospels do not provide a conclusive description of the mode John employed when baptizing Jesus.

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[74] Ferguson, 96.

[75] Mark 1:9.

[76] Mark 1:10.

[77] Köstenberger, 34.

[78] Brownson, 75n3.

[79] Daniel Isaac Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 147.

John's baptism was one of "repentance for the forgiveness of sins."[80] People came confessing their sins, and John offered them moral instruction.[81] Köstenberger notes: "The references to repentance and the forgiveness of sins make clear that John's baptism is to be understood not merely in terms of ritual purification and religious observance but as essentially *moral* and *ethical*."[82] These additional components of John's baptism further marked his role in preparing the way of the Lord.[83]

In proclaiming the Messiah's coming, John distinguished between his baptisms, performed "with water," and the Messiah's baptisms, which would be performed "with the Holy Spirit and with fire."[84] This description of the coming baptism, as Vander Zee puts it, "[referred] to the double effect of the Messiah's baptism: the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who believe and are obedient, and the fire of judgment (or possibly purification) for those who are not believing and obedient."[85] Jesus' baptism foreshadowed his ministry and its effect upon the hearers of his message—whether they believe it and are baptized in the Holy Spirit, or turn away from it and are baptized in fire.

Jesus' Baptism

As with the accounts of John the Baptist, all four Evangelists recounted Jesus' baptism by John at the start of his ministry, an indication of the importance of this

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[80] Mark 1:4.

[81] Mark 1:5; Luke 3:7-14.

[82] Köstenberger, 13. Emphasis in original.

[83] Luke 3:4.

[84] Luke 3:16.

[85] Vander Zee, 79.

event.[86] At face value, it would seem strange that Jesus would receive John's baptism, since it was one of repentance and Jesus was without sin. In fact, John stated that Jesus should baptize him instead. However, Jesus told John that he needed John's baptism "to fulfill all righteousness."[87] As Witherington notes, "this was Jesus' way of expressing his solidarity with sinners in their plight."[88] Jesus was conveying his connection with humanity. Likewise, Vander Zee explains that "Jesus' baptism was but one aspect of his total participation in our broken and fallen humanity."[89] His baptism showed that Jesus identified with the sinners he came to save by his life and death.[90] Throughout his life, Jesus continued to refer to the connection between his baptism and his suffering and death on the cross.[91]

After his baptism, Jesus came out of the water and the heavens were "torn open."[92] Vander Zee's interpretation of the heavens opening is that it demonstrated the purpose of Christ's coming. [93] The phrase "torn open" was used by the Prophet Isaiah—"Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down"—and Christ's baptism marked God's coming down to earth.[94]

All four Evangelists described how the Spirit of God descended in the form of a

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[86] Matt. 3:13:17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21,22; John 1:29-34. Ibid., 80.

[87] Matt. 3:14,15.

[88] Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 33.

[89] Vander Zee, 80.

[90] Cf. Isa. 53:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22.

[91] Mark 10:38,39; Luke 12:50.

[92] Mark 1:10. Cf. Matt. 3:16; Luke 3:21.

[93] Vander Zee, 82.

[94] Isaiah 64:1

dove.[95] This fulfilled another of Isaiah's prophecies: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."[96] The Spirit came to anoint Jesus for his ministry. This fulfilled John's earlier prophecy that the Messiah would come baptizing with the Holy Spirit. Vander Zee applies Jesus' anointing by the Spirit to Christian baptism, both as God's gift of the Spirit's presence and as the Spirit's enabling for ministry.[97] From a different standpoint, Witherington notes, "the descending dove quite possibly is meant to remind us of the dove sent out by Noah after the water ordeal he faced. As such, it symbolized a new beginning, a new creation."[98] To both Noah and Jesus, the dove signaled the arrival of a new, or renewed, existence. Ferguson also notes the allusion to the Spirit hovering over the waters of creation in Genesis 1:2.[99] The form of a dove is likely not coincidental; rather, it calls to mind salvation history and being saved through the waters.

Jesus' baptism concluded with the voice of God giving approval: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."[100] This affirmed John's earlier claim, "After me comes he who is mightier than I,"[101] and echoed Psalm 2:7's prophecy, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." Again, Vander Zee draws a connection between Jesus' baptism and Christian baptism; as shown in multiple examples from the New Testament,

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[95] Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32,33.

[96] Isa. 61:1. Jesus read this prophecy at the start of his ministry and concluded, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:16-21).

[97] Vander Zee, 82-83.

[98] Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 35.

[99] Ferguson, 101.

[100] Mark 1:11.

[101] Mark 1:7.

in both cases God declares the recipients of baptism to be his children.[102]

Other scholars, however, do not acknowledge such a direct correlation between Jesus' baptism and Christian baptism. Beasley-Murray notes that the difficulties in making such a connection are clear from the sheer variety of interpretations that are offered.[103] Ferguson concludes, "the declaration of Jesus' Sonship and the coming of the Holy Spirit on him at this time provide a parallel to the promises attached in a lesser sense to Christian baptism."[104] These scholars believe that although there are some similarities between the various baptisms, Jesus' baptism stands as a distinct occurrence reflective of his Messianic role in salvation history.

It is difficult to conclude whether John's baptism of Jesus parallels Christian baptism because of the unique circumstances of the event. In its section on church history, this study will address the early church's use of this event in developing baptismal theology and practice. Now, however, the study turns from the event authorizing Jesus' earthly ministry to the event authorizing Jesus' disciples to continue his ministry.

The Great Commission

At the close of his Gospel account, Matthew recorded Jesus' final words to his disciples.[105] In what has become known as the Great Commission, Jesus instructed them in the process of disciple making, notably directing them to "baptize" and "teach." Vander Zee describes this moment as "the pivot that reaches back to Jesus' own baptism

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[102] Vander Zee, 83.

[103] Beasley-Murray, 62-67.

[104] Ferguson, 100.

[105] Matt. 28:18-20.

and forward to the church's own baptism into the one Lord by the one Spirit."[106] Jesus' baptism achieved its final significance when he offered and applied the effects of his life and death to the mission of his people.

As per his command, Jesus' disciples already had been baptizing believers before this time[107]; but it is significant that now they were to baptize specifically "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." According to Block, "it is striking that the New Testament presents the trinitarian view of God most explicitly in the context of the rite of initiation."[108] Naming the Trinity in no uncertain terms at baptism denoted this ritual's importance at the start of the Christian life, and signaled that the whole Godhead was at work. Brownson makes three points regarding the phrase "in the name of": God's authority is given to the baptizer; reliance is placed upon God to do what he says he will do; and God's ownership is placed on the recipient.[109] As the mission statement that Jesus gave to his followers, the Great Commission presents baptism in conjunction with the character of God. Nothing is said about the method of applying water or the recipients of baptism.

John 3

Though not an explicit reference to baptism, the description of "new birth" that Jesus gave to Nicodemus has been associated with baptismal theology by various groups throughout the history of the Church. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless one is born of water

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[106] Vander Zee, 81-82.

[107] John 4:1-2.

[108] Block, 147.

[109] Brownson, 80-81.

and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God."[110] Ferguson calls this "the most important text" on baptism in John's Gospel, noting that it was the most cited text regarding baptism in the second century.[111] For example, in reference to this passage, early church father John Chrysostom described water baptism as "absolute and indispensable," for it fulfills "the pledges of our covenant with God."[112] According to Chrysostom, the waters of baptism effect the removal of the old self and impart the new self. However, theologians since at least the time of the Protestant Reformation have disputed the connection that some make between this text and the practice of baptism. John Calvin interpreted Jesus' reference to water and spirit in this passage to mean the same thing: the spiritual new birth. Calvin concludes that if Jesus were describing water baptism, then the outward sign of baptism is necessary to effect spiritual regeneration.[113]

Today, scholars continue to debate Jesus' intent. New Testament scholar Donald Carson interprets the relationship between water and spirit in light of their Old Testament allusions.[114] Jesus was surprised that Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, was unable to comprehend what "born of water and the Spirit" meant. Thus, Carson contends, Jesus' meaning was to be found in the Hebrew scriptures that would have been familiar to Nicodemus. When used figuratively in the Old Testament, "water" referred to the

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[110] John 3:5.

[111] Ferguson, 142-143.

[112] Joel C. Elowsky and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *John 1-10*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, 4a (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 113.

[113] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1949), 110.

[114] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 191-196.

cleansing and renewal associated with the giving of God's Spirit.[115] The most compelling example of this is from Ezekiel's prophecy, in which water signified "cleansing from impurity" and the new spirit depicted "the transformation of heart that will enable people to follow God wholly."[116] Carson also notes the close association in Ezekiel between this passage and the following one, depicting the image of the valley of the dry bones; he also points out how the giving of a "new heart" evoked Jeremiah's description of the new covenant.[117] Carson concludes that Jesus was speaking of water spiritually and not physically; hence, his words to Nicodemus were not referencing the rite of baptism.[118]

In a contrasting analysis, Beasley-Murray considers both the immediate context of the passage as well as its relationship with the rest of John's Gospel.[119] The verses that followed the water and spirit reference focused on the work of the Spirit. This leads Beasley-Murray to conclude that the new birth is primarily the work of the Spirit.[120] However, this does not mean that water baptism was not in John's field of vision. In John 6, Jesus' references to the "bread of life" clearly signaled the future participation of Christians in the Lord's Supper, so it is not outside the realm of possibility that Jesus also was setting the precedence for the practice of water baptism.[121] While it is inconclusive

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[115] Cf. Num. 19:17-19; Ps. 51:9-10; Isa. 32:15; 44:3-5; 55:1-3; Jer. 2:13; 17:13; Ezek. 47:9; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 14:8.

[116] Carson, 195. Cf. Ezek. 36:25-27.

[117] Ezek. 37; Jer. 31:31.

[118] "What is emphasized is the need for radical transformation, the fulfilment [sic] of Old Testament promises anticipating the outpouring of the Spirit, and not a particular rite. If baptism is associated in the readers' minds with entrance into the Christian faith, and therefore with new birth, then they are being told in the strongest terms that it is the new birth itself that is essential, not the rite." Carson, 196.

[119] Beasley-Murray, 226-232.

[120] Ibid., 231.

[121] Ibid.

that Jesus was speaking of water baptism in his conversation with Nicodemus, the case can be made that Jesus' words are related to the broader meaning of baptism.

Summary

Many passages from the Four Gospels have been considered for their relevancy to understanding the practice and theology of baptism, including the ministry of John the Baptist, his baptism of Jesus, the Great Commission, and Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. This study now turns from the first part of the New Testament to the account of the early church contained in the Book of Acts.

The Acts of the Apostles

How was baptism practiced by the followers of Christ as the story of the church unfolds in the Book of Acts? It is difficult to understand how the earliest Christians practiced baptism because there is no explicit teaching on or explanation of the actions involved, only passing references to the moment of baptism. However, since, as Block states, "Acts provides the most detailed information on the practice of baptism in the first-century church," this study will focus on the conflicting interpretations of many of its baptismal references.[122]

Of course, as Witherington points out, there are challenges in knowing how to use passages from Acts to arrive at a theology of baptism. First, advocates of both believer's and infant baptism use various texts in Acts as "prescriptive and normative" to justify their respective views.[123] Second, Acts is a "self-confessed missionary document."[124] Because of the stage of the church's development, certain problems regarding baptism

[122] Block, 147.

[123] Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 51.

[124] Ibid., 52.

are addressed while others are not.

One way to structure a discussion of Acts would be to address the important themes for understanding baptism, as Witherington does, focusing on passages that speak to infant and believer's baptism.[125] Instead, this study will follow sequentially through Acts, examining how interpretations of baptism unfolded as the church spread from Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and beyond.[126]

Acts 1–2 – In Jerusalem

In the second part of his letter to Theophilus, Luke portrayed the final resurrection appearances of Christ before his ascension. As he gathered with his disciples, Jesus reminded them that although John baptized with water, they would soon be "baptized with the Holy Spirit."[127] Before he ascended, Jesus commanded his followers to "be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" after they received power from the Holy Spirit.[128] Like the Great Commission in Matthew, this charge invoked the bestowing of power, by Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of witnessing and making disciples.

Not long after Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit descended into Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.[129] This first instance of Spirit baptism was perplexing to outsiders, until Peter instructed the new believers to "repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins," and promised "the gift of the Holy

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[125] Ibid., 51-78.

[126] The following headings reflect the approach in Block, 147-49.

[127] Acts 1:5.

[128] Acts 1:8.

[129] Acts 2:1-4.

Spirit ... [to them and their] children and [to] all who [were] far off, everyone whom the Lord our God [called] to himself."[130] Presbyterian theologian Sinclair Ferguson points out, "Here repentance, water baptism, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit are seen as correlative aspects of the one reality of entrance into Christ, and thus into (the fellowship of) the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."[131] Peter's statement was a summation of coming to faith in Christ.

There are different opinions on to whom Peter was referring when he spoke of the recipients of the promise of baptism. Murray connects Peter's words with the covenant promises made to Abraham and his seed, pointing out "that there was no suspension or abrogation of that divine administration whereby children are embraced with their parents in God's covenant promise."[132] In other words, God's promises to the children of believers did not change from the time of Abraham to the time of the church. In his analysis of the passage, Brownson draws attention to Peter's quotation of the Prophet Joel: "What is easy for us to miss, but what ancient readers would have caught immediately, is that the Joel prophecy cited here is speaking about *households*."[133] Specifically, the first hearers (and readers) of Peter's words would have understood the connection that he was making between baptism and the household conception of faith, which would have included infants.

Although some may conclude that Peter's Old Testament allusions constituted support for infant baptism, Everett Ferguson disputes this, claiming, "On this occasion

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[130] Acts 2:38-39.

[131] Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 195.

[132] Murray, 68.

[133] Cf. Joel 2:28-32. Brownson, 125. Emphasis in original.

. . . those who were baptized were 'those who received his word' (2:41) and could repent (2:38); in the larger context the 'sons and daughters' (2:17) were old enough to prophesy."[134] In other words, "households," as per the reference to Joel, would not include infants since they do not have the ability to speak. This view emphasizes the requirement to understand and profess faith before receiving baptism, which implies that infants are not included in the definition of "household." Clearly, paedobaptists and credobaptists use the same proof texts to prove their respective—and opposing—viewpoints.

Witherington suggests that we should keep "Luke's geographical approach to history writing and the telling of the story of the early church" in mind when analyzing Peter's injunction to repent and be baptized, and his promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we should read his words as applying to "Jews in distant lands." However, Witherington contends that while Peter's statements originally were aimed at this particular (Jewish) audience, they also can apply to a wider (Gentile) audience.[135]

Acts 8:4-25 – In Samaria

Following the stoning of Stephen, the church began to scatter. The good news now spread beyond the bounds of Judea into neighboring Samaria through the preaching of Philip. Men and women who believed were subsequently baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus," although they did not receive the Holy Spirit until Peter and John visited and laid hands on them.[136] This laying on of hands seems to be a unique occurrence connected with the office of the Apostles, and signified that baptism by water and Spirit

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[134] Everett Ferguson, 169.

[135] Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 155-56.

[136] Acts 8:12-13, 15-16, 17.

now applied to Gentiles as well as Jews.[137]

In his analysis of the spread of the early church, Ferguson points out,

> In view of the centuries of animosity between Jews and Samaritans, incorporating Samaritans into the new people of God and their acceptance by Jewish believers was not something that could be taken for granted and needed a special show of divine favor related to the leadership of the Jerusalem church.[138]

Thus, according to Ferguson, this particular episode did not signal that the laying of hands was normative for Spirit baptism; rather, it showed that the good news was now bringing unity between groups that previously would not have worshiped together.

Baptist scholar Robert Stein claims that the Samaritan baptism shows that "Christian baptism did not serve as an automatic rite through which one received the Spirit."[139] Some people experienced a period of time in between being baptized in the name of Jesus and receiving the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. The account of Simon Magus shows that baptism and even profession of belief can occur apart from reception of the Spirit.[140] After he received baptism, Simon witnessed the Apostles' laying hands on the people to confer the Holy Spirit, and he asked if they could give him this same power. Despite his baptism and accompanying profession of faith, he had not truly repented and received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:26-40 – On the Road to Gaza

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch provides the next example of

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[137] Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 289.

[138] Ferguson, 171-172.

[139] Robert H. Stein, "Baptism in Luke-Acts," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner, Shawn D. Wright, and E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), 54.

[140] Acts 8:13,18-24.

baptism in Acts. After sharing Isaiah's Song of the Suffering Servant with the eunuch, Philip explained "the good news about Jesus."[141] The eunuch believed, and as they passed some water along the road, he asked to be baptized. The two men "went down (καταβαίνω) into (εἰς) the water" to be baptized, and then "came up (ἀναβαίνω) out of (ἐκ) the water."[142] New Testament scholar David Seccombe points out that "[the Ethiopian had] been to Jerusalem to worship, so [was] presumably a proselyte. However, his emasculate condition would have barred him from sharing fully in the worship of the temple."[143] Just like the Samaritans', the Ethiopian's baptism demonstrated that outsiders, who could not fully worship with the Jews, were to be included in the new church.

Scholars debate whether the text implies immersion baptism. Ferguson believes that a simple reading of the text supports immersion.[144] However, Witherington notes that Luke, the author of Acts, was concerned with conversion and the response to it, rather than with the ritual itself; he made no explicit reference to immersion or the amount of water used.[145]

Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-21 – In Damascus

Saul's conversion, described in the next chapter of Acts, highlights the interrelationship between conversion and initiation.[146] Saul heard the voice of Jesus while

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[141] Acts 8:35. Cf. Isa. 53:7-8.

[142] Acts 8:36-37.

[143] David P. Seccombe, "The New People of God," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 360.

[144] Ferguson, 173.

[145] He further states that the earliest explicit reference to these details is in the *Didache*, which will be discussed later. Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 300n89.

[146] Ibid., 313-314.

on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus.[147] He was struck blind and fasted for three days, until Ananias, commanded by God, came to him. Ananias laid his hands on Saul so that he would regain his sight and "be filled with the Holy Spirit."[148] Then, at Ananias' command, Saul rose and was baptized; as he called on Jesus' name, his sins were washed away.[149] Scholars posit that these latter imperatives prompted at least two practices in early Christian baptism. First, Ross shows that "washing" signified water baptism; as in the mode established by John the Baptist, spiritual baptism was united with physical cleansing.[150] Second, Ferguson notes that Christian baptism was distinguished by the invocation of the name of Christ, an affirmation of faith.[151]

Acts 10:1–11:18 – In Caesarea

Luke included an extended narrative of the conversion of Cornelius, a Gentile soldier, in Acts.[152] After Cornelius and Peter experienced related visions, Cornelius sent for Peter to come to Caesarea. Peter preached the good news to Cornelius and "his relatives and close friends."[153] During his sermon, the Holy Spirit "fell on" all who heard, and they began speaking in tongues, just as on the Day of Pentecost.[154] Since Cornelius' household had already received the Holy Spirit, Peter commanded them "to be baptized

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[147] Acts 9:3-6.

[148] Acts 9:17.

[149] Acts 22:16. This reference is from Paul's recounting of his conversion and baptism to Jews in Jerusalem.

[150] Ross, "Baptism and Circumcision as Signs and Seals," 102.

[151] Ferguson, 175.

[152] Ferguson notes that the triple account in Acts of Cornelius' conversion (10:1-48; 11:4-17; 15:7-11) is similar to the triple account of Paul's conversion. Ibid., 176.

[153] Acts 10:24.

[154] Acts 10:44-46; 11:15.

in the name of Jesus Christ."[155] This is the first instance of household conversion found in Acts, and Ferguson calls this baptism "the test case for receiving uncircumcised Gentiles" into the Christian community that was formerly comprised of circumcised Jews.[156] However, according to Ferguson, this does not mean that infants were both present and baptized in Cornelius' household.[157] In fact, small children would be unable to demonstrate the signs and perform the actions of conversion described in these verses.

In addition, as New Testament scholar Andrew Clark observes, "It would seem that . . . once the apostles [legitimized] the Gentile mission they [could fade] from the scene."[158] The advent of Gentile conversion and baptism precipitated a change in the Apostles' role, as the church in Jerusalem began to send out missionaries. Cornelius' baptism was part of the arc of God's mission, begun by Jesus, continued by the Apostles, and furthered by the church.

This episode showed that it was possible to receive the Spirit before being baptized with water. Stein notes that the normative experience for most Baptist believers today is "receiving the Spirit before [water] baptism." [159] Unlike paedobaptists, credobaptists await signs of conversion before administering baptism as its sign and seal, believing this practice is more faithful to the testimony of Scripture.

Acts 16:12-34; 18:8 – In Philippi and Corinth

On his second missionary journey, Paul visited Philippi. He met Lydia and a

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[155] Acts 10:47-48.

[156] Ferguson, 176.

[157] Ibid., 178.

[158] Andrew C. Clark, "The Role of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 176-177.

[159] Stein, 55.

group of other women by the riverside outside the city gate, and the Lord opened her heart to hear Paul's message. She was then baptized, along with her household (οἶκος).[160] In the ancient Greek world, a household included the master's servants, guests, and family, including children; the household adopted the religion of the master.[161] New Testament theologian Joachim Jeremias draws attention to the "*oikos* formula" used in the household baptisms described in Acts, and claims that infants and small children would have been present for these occasions.[162] However, Ferguson concludes that Lydia's was likely a solely female household. In order to be the head of the household, Lydia had to be a woman of means, able to support herself and her dependents. If male servants were present, Luke would have accounted for them. In addition, Ferguson claims, any children present would have been old enough to listen to Paul's words and believe.[163]

Paul and Silas later were jailed in Philippi after casting out a "spirit of divination" from a slave girl.[164] A great earthquake shook the doors of the jail open and the prisoners were freed. When Paul prevented the jailor from taking his own life, the jailor asked what he must do to be saved. Paul responded, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be

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[160] Acts 16:15. This is the first verse in Acts directly associating the terms "household" and "baptized." Earlier in Acts 10, Cornelius and members of his household professed faith and were baptized, but the "*oikos* formula" is not present.

[161] For a description of who would have been included in such a household, see Jonathan M. Watt, "The *Oikos* Formula," in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003), 79-80.

[162] Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 19-23.

[163] Ferguson, 179.

[164] Acts 16:16.

saved, you and your household."[165] The jailor believed, and "he and all his family" were baptized.[166] New Testament scholar Joel Green notes that "nineteenth- and twentieth-century moderns for whom individual-oriented and segregating ways of thinking have [become] natural" may find household conversions like this difficult to understand.[167] However, baptizing the entire household was indicative of an ancient understanding of salvation that modern readers should be wary of dismissing. For his part, Ferguson does not discount the presence of children in this particular account as he does with the account of Lydia's household conversion. However, in contrast with Green, he stipulates that each individual in the jailor's household was able to hear the Word and respond, rather than have the jailor's faith applied to him or her.[168]

Further along on his journey, Paul preached to Jews and Gentiles in Corinth. Here, Crispus, the "ruler of the synagogue," along with his entire household and "many of the Corinthians," believed and was baptized.[169] This is Luke's final account of a household conversion, and it comprehensively describes the acts of hearing, believing, and being baptized, all of which were present in the preceding narratives of Cornelius, Lydia, and the jailor. What is common to all of these accounts is an association between the faith of the head of the household and of the rest of the household. The debate concerning the age of the recipients is inconclusive, and hinges more upon the

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[165] Acts 16:31.

[166] Acts 16:33.

[167] Joel B. Green, "'Salvation to the Ends of the Earth' (Acts 13:47): The Saviour in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 106.

[168] Ferguson, 180.

[169] Acts 18:8.

interpretation of related texts—such as the prophecies of Ezekiel and Joel—than upon allowing the passages in Acts to stand on their own merit.

Acts 18:24–19:7 – At Ephesus

As Paul passed through Ephesus, he found some of John the Baptist's disciples. Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit, and they admitted that they had not heard of it. Once he realized that they had only received John's "baptism of repentance," Paul baptized the disciples "in the name of the Lord Jesus."[170] He laid hands on them and the Holy Spirit "came on them."[171] Then, they displayed manifestations of the Spirit similar to the ones at Pentecost and in Caesarea.

These signs of the filling of the Holy Spirit indicated a new stage in the expansion of the Church. At Pentecost, Jews were baptized upon believing in Jesus. Cornelius was baptized to indicate that circumcision was no longer required for inclusion in the community of God's people. Paul's baptism of John's disciples demonstrated the inadequacy of John's baptism and the ascendancy of Christian baptism. Ferguson notes the difficulty of interpreting this passage because it is the only scriptural example of "re-baptism."[172] There was something lacking in their first baptism to necessitate this second baptism, but the reasons are not plain from this passage.

Summary

In conclusion, descriptions of baptism in Acts are brief, and their interpretation depends largely on how the first hearers would have understood the narratives in relationship to the Old Testament. Luke was less concerned with prescribing methods of

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[170] Acts 19:3-5.

[171] Acts 19:6.

[172] Ferguson, 181-182.

baptismal practice and more concerned with recounting the spread of the gospel beyond Israel, and showing how baptism was an important marker of that spread. Today, it is common for the same text to be applied in defense of credobaptist and paedobaptist interpretations.

The Epistles

While the Book of Acts tells the unfolding story of the Church and God's mission in the world, the Letters of the Apostles provide windows into the lives of the first Christians and the early churches. Paul and other authors addressed the problems that arose as people began to live together in these new communities. And although they included little to no discussion of baptismal practices, especially in comparison to Paul's explicit instructions regarding the Lord's Supper,[173] most of the authors referred to the connection between water and Spirit baptism, focusing on the spiritual aspects of baptism.

Romans 6

Paul described the meaning and practice of baptism in his letter to the Church in Rome.[174] He asked his readers, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."[175] Baptism into Jesus is baptism into his death. In his analysis of the first and second Adams, whom Paul had introduced in the preceding chapter of Acts, Vander Zee claims, "By baptism we are new human beings in

[173] 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

[174] Rom. 6:3-11.

[175] Rom. 6:3-4.

the new Adam. Baptism makes real in our experience and through faith what God *has already done* in his Son."[176] Through baptism, the Christian dies to the old dominion of sin and rises to new life where Christ reigns.

Paul was asking his readers in Rome to remember their baptism. Commentator Douglass Moo calls Paul's use of baptism shorthand for the entire conversion experience.[177] At this point, however, Paul did not link resurrection with baptism,[178] and Vander Zee suggests that Paul was making the point that our death in baptism is different from our resurrection: "We experience our death in Christ every day as we respond to Jesus' invitation to 'take up your cross and follow me.' But our resurrection, and with it the restoration of all things, lies in the future."[179] Baptism is an ongoing reminder of our present reality of dying to sin, while at the same time, it points us to the hope of future resurrection with Christ.

Scholars continue to debate whether Paul was describing only Spirit baptism in this passage, or if he also meant to include water baptism. New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner maintains that Paul did not have a merely metaphorical understanding of baptism, and that, in fact, "separating water baptism and Spirit baptism introduces a false dichotomy into the Pauline argument." Because in the days of the early church, "virtually all were baptized immediately after putting their faith in Christ," Schreiner argues that "both Spirit baptism and water baptism were part and parcel of the complex

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[176] Vander Zee, 86-87. Emphasis in original.

[177] Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 355.

[178] Cf. Col. 2:12.

[179] Vander Zee, 88.

of saving events that took place at conversion."[180] Furthermore, Schreiner claims that this passage and the corresponding verses in the letter to the Colossian Church both allude to the practice of immersion.[181] This symbolic interpretation of baptism—as death by submersion and life by emersion—is found as early as the second century in the writings of Tertullian.

However, Moo counters that nowhere in the New Testament is this symbolism for baptism made explicit.[182] Moo believes that the most faithful interpretation of the text is that baptism mediates participation in Christ's burial.[183] Death and burial, here and in Colossians, refer to the finality of the Christian's break with sin.[184] In this context, baptism—as the referent to conversion and initiation—is the event leading to the new life into which Christians are to live, what Vander Zee calls "a baptized way of living."[185] Paul was interested in how to live in response to these events, rather than in unraveling the symbolism of baptismal practice.

1 Corinthians 1

At the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul bemoaned the factions that were forming within the church: some were claiming to be followers of Apollos or Paul, others of Jesus. Paul pointed out that he himself only baptized a few of the members

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[180] Thomas R. Schreiner, "Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner, Shawn D. Wright, and E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), 74-75.

[181] Ibid., 81.

[182] Moo, 361-362.

[183] Ibid., 363.

[184] Ibid., 365.

[185] Vander Zee, 86.

of the Corinthian church, and certainly not in his own name.[186] Schreiner asserts that Paul clearly was alluding to water baptism, seen as a rite of initiation into the community.[187] In his other letters, Paul did not name the people performing baptisms, so scholars like Witherington believe that Paul was metaphorically addressing spiritual baptism by using water imagery.[188]

Paul closed this discussion of baptism by saying, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel."[189] According to Schreiner, "Paul [did] not denigrate the practice of baptism per se, but baptism must be subordinated to the gospel so that it does not sabotage the gospel, that is, that Christ was crucified for sinners."[190] In other words, Paul did not intend to do away with baptism; rather, he recognized that the importance of baptism could only be understood in light of the good news he was preaching.

1 Corinthians 6

Although he did not explicitly mention "baptism" (βαπτίζω), in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul used "wash" (ἀπολούω), the same term Ananias used at Paul's baptism.[191] Here, the word was linked with sanctification and justification. New Testament scholar Richard Hays states that these "three descriptions of the one fundamental transformation that has occurred for those who now belong to Christ" were the basis for Christian living by the

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[186] 1 Cor. 1:10-17.

[187] Schreiner, 79.

[188] Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 81.

[189] 1 Cor. 1:17.

[190] Schreiner, 80.

[191] Acts 22:16.

Corinthians, in opposition to the practices of their pagan neighbors.[192] Schreiner concurs, pointing out that "the three verbs denote what occurred at conversion. . . . ['Washing'] recalls baptism which symbolizes the cleansing of sin that occurs when believers come to faith."[193] This cleansing was an important marker for the Corinthian believers, helping them recall their conversion.

1 Corinthians 10

A few chapters later, Paul warned against hearing yet not living by the Word of God. He gave the example of the Israelites at the time of Moses, many of whom were "overthrown in the wilderness" despite participating in God's saving acts and provision for Israel.[194] He drew a parallel between God's people, who were "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," and his readers, who were baptized into Christ. In an allusion to the Lord's Supper, Paul also mentioned "spiritual food and drink" (10:3-4). According to Witherington, Paul's point was "that such rituals without a godly life are no guarantee of salvation or even present spiritual well-being."[195] Schreiner agrees, concluding, "The parallels to baptism and the Lord's Supper are adduced to stave off any notion that they magically and inevitably protect the Corinthians from future judgment."[196] Neither baptism, whether on dry land as with the Israelites or by water as with Christians, nor participation in the sacraments is sufficient for salvation.

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[192] Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: Westminister John Knox Press, 2011), 98.

[193] Schreiner, 83.

[194] 1 Cor. 10:1-5.

[195] Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 80.

[196] Schreiner, 81.

1 Corinthians 12

In his next discourse on baptism, Paul used the metaphor of one body with many members. Baptism represented being united as one body to the same Spirit: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."[197] Here again, Paul employed imagery of water baptism to describe Spirit baptism. Hays believes that this was a metaphorical representation of Spirit baptism, particularly in light of other New Testament passages that "[suggest] that it should be distinguished from water baptism rather than simply identified with it." In fact, Hayes claims that "immersion in water provide[d] the literal reference point for Paul's metaphorical description; his point [was] that the community as a whole ha[d] been immersed in the Spirit's power."[198] Hays believes that in this passage, baptism did not refer to the collective water baptisms of the body. Schreiner disagrees, however, saying that although water and Spirit baptism "conceptually . . . may be distinguished, . . . Paul himself was not interested in distinguishing them from one another in this verse since both [were] associated with the transition from the old life to the new."[199] Schreiner believes that Paul would not have seen a difference between these two baptisms, and that this verse in fact links Spirit baptism and water baptism.

Galatians 3

In his letter to the Galatian Church, Paul likened baptism to putting on new

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[197] 1 Cor. 12:13.

[198] Hays, 214. For the distinction of "baptized in the Holy Spirit," see Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5.

[199] Schreiner, 72.

clothes: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."[200] Vander Zee notes that during baptisms in the early church, "a person would strip off the old clothes, step into the waters of baptism, and emerge to put on a new set of clothes."[201] It is unknown whether this ritual was practiced in Paul's time, but it vividly illustrated the analogy that Paul drew in Galatians. Schreiner points out that this verse showed that "baptism was universal in the church (and hence central!), since all those who [were] clothed with Christ (i.e., all Christians) [were] baptized."[202] And although he did not explicitly reference water baptism in this verse, Paul's implicit understanding was that all Christians received water baptism.

Also important to the context of Paul's statement about baptism and new garments was the entry of a new social reality: "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . slave nor free . . . no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."[203] According to Vander Zee, "Many commentators regard this verse as a part of an early Christian baptismal liturgy . . . repeated in other letters of Paul with slight variations."[204] It is possible that Paul was quoting a common phrase pronounced by candidates at the time of baptism. Confirming this view, commentator Ronald Fung claims that "the three antitheses . . . seem to have been deliberately chosen with an eye to the threefold privilege for which a pious male Jew daily thanked God: that he was not made a Gentile,

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[200] Gal. 3:27.

[201] Vander Zee, 89.

[202] Schreiner, 74.

[203] Gal. 3:28.

[204] Vander Zee, 89. Cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11.

a slave, or a woman—categories of people debarred from certain religious privileges."[205] Turning this familiar prayer into a formula reflected the extension of the new identity in Christ through baptism and was a further step in the process of leaving behind the "old garments."

Additionally in this section, Paul enjoined his readers that "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."[206] Paul's understanding of the connection between faith and baptism will be discussed below in regards to the parallel with Colossians 2:12, but it is notable that in Galatians 3, terms for faith are mentioned fifteen times while baptism is mentioned but once.[207]

Ephesians 4

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he included baptism in a statement of belief concerning unity among the body of Christ: "There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."[208] Witherington observes that according to this formula, baptism is to be experienced only once when coming to faith.[209] Schreiner concurs, saying, "Baptism here designates an initiation rite shared in common by all those belonging to the church of Jesus Christ."[210] Repeated washing was not required to continue as a member of the body; rather, the act of baptism initiated believers into the community. Paul's focus in this passage was on the unity of the

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[205] Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 175.

[206] Gal. 3:26.

[207] Fung, 173.

[208] Eph. 4:4-6.

[209] Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 89.

[210] Schreiner, 71.

Christian faith, of which baptism was an important part.[211]

Colossians 2

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul reiterated his statement in Romans concerning burial with Christ in baptism and being raised with Him, although he added the phrase "through faith."[212] Ferguson points out that Paul made explicit what was implied in Romans: in baptism, Christians are not only buried with Christ but also raised in him.[213] He also notes that faith and baptism are explicitly linked.

Part of the challenge in understanding Paul's meaning in Colossians is that he mentioned circumcision in parallel with baptism. "The circumcision of Christ" did not refer to his physical circumcision as an infant, but rather to his death on the cross.[214] Ross observes that the concept of cleansing is what connects circumcision and baptism in Colossians, and asserts that Paul was speaking only of the spiritual aspects of circumcision and baptism and not the physical rites.[215] Similarly, Witherington concludes that "it is hard not to believe that Paul saw water baptism as in one sense the Christian's circumcision."[216] The meaning of circumcision shaped Paul's theology of baptism.

If circumcision and baptism are connected spiritually, is it possible that the physical rites are also linked? This cannot be determined from a plain reading of

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[211] The Lord's Supper is absent from this list, but Paul is not attempting to provide here a comprehensive statement of faith. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 240.

[212] Col. 2:11-12.

[213] Ferguson, 159-160.

[214] R. Kent Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 75.

[215] The other uniting theme of circumcision and baptism, according to Ross, is consecration. Cf. Gen. 17; Matt. 28:18-20. Ross, "Baptism and Circumcision as Signs and Seals," 101-106.

[216] Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 87.

Colossians. While circumcision entails a bloody removal of flesh applied to males only, baptism is a bloodless act applied regardless of gender. But are (all) children allowed to receive baptism in the same way that (male) children received circumcision? Schreiner notes that in this passage, Paul was speaking of spiritual circumcision "made without hands"; he was referring to Old Testament passages addressing the problem of uncircumcised hearts in physically circumcised bodies.[217] In Schreiner's estimation, physical baptism was offered to those showing signs of conversion and Spirit baptism, while physical circumcision did not involve an acknowledgement of faith.[218]

Contesting this interpretation, Ross appeals to the covenantal aspects of circumcision, the sign offered to covenant members and their children. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament, and baptism was the sign in the New Testament.[219] Elsewhere, Paul spoke of children as if they were included in the new covenant.[220] From this, Ross concludes that children of believers may receive baptism as the covenantal sign on the basis of covenantal membership in both the Old and New Testaments. He further notes that if Paul meant to signal a change in to whom the sign may be applied, then he would have referred explicitly to such a shift. Credobaptists, like Schreiner, cite the silence of scripture when challenging infant baptism; however, Ross challenges believer's baptism by citing the same scriptural silence on the removal of children from the covenant.[221]

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[217] See Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 9:23-24.

[218] Schreiner, 78.

[219] Ross, "Baptism and Circumcision as Signs and Seals," 107-108.

[220] 1 Cor. 7:12-14; Eph. 6:1-3.

[221] Ross, "Baptism and Circumcision as Signs and Seals," 110-111.

Titus 3

In his letter to Titus, Paul explained God's work in the process of salvation: "He saved us . . . by the washing (λουτρόν) of regeneration (παλιγγενεσία)."[222] Paul used language reminiscent of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, during which he told him about being "born by water and the Spirit."[223] Some interpret this as meaning that water baptism is able to regenerate someone spiritually—"baptismal regeneration"—yet in context, Paul was teaching that God's work is in spiritual baptism.

Since Paul was emphasizing the work of the Spirit in salvation, it is unclear whether water baptism was even in view. After noting the reasons for questioning water baptism, Ferguson interjects that even with a purely spiritual reading of the text, Paul's meaning is still identified with and connected to baptism.[224] His objection stems from wanting to prevent baptism from being understood as a work of righteousness, but Paul expressly ruled out this understanding.[225]

Commentator George Knight notes that this passage is sometimes believed to be an early Christian hymn of praise.[226] Although Knight does not hold this position himself, he does allow that since God is addressed in the third person, the passage may have been used liturgically as a creedal statement during the baptismal ritual of the Early Church.

Hebrews 10

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews used the images of "sprinkled clean"

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[222] Titus 3:5.

[223] John 3:5.

[224] Ferguson, 164.

[225] Cf. Rom. 3:27,28; 4:2-6; 9:11; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 29; 2 Tim. 1:9.

[226] George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 350.

(ῥαντίζω) and "washed" (λούω) to represent the inward state of baptized Christians.[227] In this way, baptism functioned as an assurance of faith. Earlier in this letter, the author used the term "sprinkling" to allude to the former practice of sacrifice and the present sprinkling of Christ's blood for purification.[228] In this example from Hebrews 10, the additional act of "washing" was performed with pure water. Elsewhere in the New Testament, λούω is used to mean being freed from sins with Christ's blood.[229] Christ's blood cleanses the baptized from sins.

Again, scholars debate whether the author of Hebrews was calling for water baptism in addition to spiritual baptism. According to commentator Frederick Bruce, the passage "most probably [referred to] Christian baptism . . . [in which] the outward application of water [was] the visible sign of the inward and spiritual cleansing wrought by God in those who come to him through Christ."[230] Washing with water signified the Christian's assurance. Ferguson concedes that this passage is referring to water baptism. However, he disagrees with those who infer that "sprinkling" indicates the mode of applying water, pointing to Old Testament rituals in which sprinkling and washing were separate acts.[231] In context, the sprinkling of Christ's blood effects the spiritual cleansing needed for a full assurance of faith.

1 Peter 3

In his first letter, Peter wrote, "Baptism . . . now saves you, not as a removal of

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[227] Heb. 10:22. Cf. 1 Cor. 6:11.

[228] Heb. 9:13-14, 19-22.

[229] Rev. 1:5.

[230] Frederick F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 255.

[231] Ferguson, 188, Lev. 14:6-8, 15-16.

dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."[232] Schreiner believes this is one of the central verses addressing baptism; he claims that Peter was speaking of water baptism, teaching that "baptism saves only because it is anchored to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The waters themselves do not cleanse as is the case when a bath removes dirt from the body."[233] Ferguson similarly interprets this passage to mean that the basis for cleansing is not baptism itself but the work of Christ on behalf of the recipient.[234]

Commentators disagree about the word ἐπερώτημα, translated here as "appeal" but translated elsewhere as "pledge." Appealing implies that God is the actor in the cleansing process, whereas in pledging, the person vows to maintain his or her good conscience. For Vander Zee, baptism is an appeal to the believer to trust in God for the outworking of his or her baptism.[235] Similarly, in his work on the NIV translation's "pledge," New Testament scholar I. H. Marshall points out: "We come to baptism not because we have a good conscience . . . but precisely because we feel guilty and in need of forgiveness and renewal." He prefers the term "appeal" to "pledge," as it turns the act into "a prayer for forgiveness and cleansing," and better indicates that the primary actor in baptism is God rather than the recipient.[236] Despite variations in interpretation, Schreiner concludes that either way, there is a "subjective appropriation of God's grace"

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[232] 1 Pet. 3:21.

[233] Schreiner, 70.

[234] Ferguson, 193.

[235] Vander Zee, 91-92.

[236] I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 131.

whereby the recipient takes hold of the promises of their baptism.[237]

Summary

The letters of Paul, Peter, and the writer to the Hebrews have been surveyed for the various ways that they illustrated the meaning of baptism to the first churches.

Conclusion

The Bible offers various descriptions and images of the rite of initiation into the Church. After situating baptism in its biblical context, this study now considers some ways that these understandings have been interpreted and applied in baptismal practices over the course of Church history.

Liturgical History of the Rite of Baptism

According to liturgical theologian Brian Spinks, "all the exotic liturgies in the world, and all the fine words of theologians are useless if churches do not physically proclaim through their worship space and practice the importance of this ritual [baptism]."[238] In assessing the historical development of baptism, this study will focus on the correlation between theology and practice. First, it will analyze those surviving sources that provide detail on baptismal practices in the early church, comparing the development of these practices in both Western and Eastern churches from before the Reformation to today. Second, it will discuss the main strains of practice coming out of the Reformation, specifically Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Calvinist. Calvin's theology will be addressed in further detail, leading into an analysis of the work of the Westminster Assembly. Finally, this study will focus specifically on twentieth-century developments

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[237] Schreiner, 70.

[238] Bryan D. Spinks, *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 211.

in the ecumenical movement and its influence on current practices.

Early Church 100-400

As it grew numerically and geographically, the early church refined and implemented New Testament baptismal practices. It is difficult for historians to reconstruct baptismal practices from this period, however. The few extant sources are minimal in length. Moreover, most of them are not primarily concerned with documenting the church's practice and theology of baptism; they mention these only in passing. This changed over time, however, and documents dating from the fourth century include sermons given in conjunction with the rites of initiation.[239]

Notwithstanding these challenges, twentieth-century scholars were convinced that a single baptismal practice could be found amongst the local variations. They cobbled together data from these incomplete sources in an attempt to locate this unified church practice and use it to develop a framework for present-day practice.[240] By the end of the twentieth century, however, this approach was largely discredited. As liturgical historian Maxwell Johnson states, "There appears to have been no single common pattern, ritual contents or theological interpretation which suggest themselves as universally normative, apart from some rather obvious things like catechesis, the water bath and the profession of Trinitarian faith."[241] Rather than a singular, normative baptismal pattern characterizing the early church, the historical record reveals a diversity of practices. In fact, historian

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[239] For a collection of these sermons, see Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994).

[240] See Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991).

[241] E. C. Whitaker and Maxwell E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), xiv.

Paul Bradshaw claims: "To emphasize what is common and to ignore what is distinctive of individual churches . . . is seriously to distort our understanding of the variety of primitive Christian practice, and to lay a false foundation for the modern revision of initiation rites."[242] It is clear that modern readers must acknowledge the diversity of early church practices when they analyze the significance of baptismal rites today.[243]

With these challenges and assumptions in mind, this section will analyze some of the extant documents from the first four centuries of the early church in order to discover the variety of baptismal practices and discern the meanings attached to them. This period covers the history of the church as it developed from an underground group, splintering from Judaism, into the endorsed religion of the Roman Empire under the reign of Constantine.

Didache

The *Didache*, or "The Teaching," was a training manual for church leaders, likely Syrian, that has been variously dated to the late first or mid-second century.[244] The first six chapters taught two ways of living; they were followed by four chapters addressing church practices related to these ways of living. Chapter seven directly addressed baptism, the act performed in response to the teaching of the preceding chapters. According to the *Didache,* baptism was to be administered in the Triune name and in running ("living") water or other water that was either cold or warm; and it was to be

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[242] Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 170.

[243] Tacitly, appreciating the diversity of the early church may draw churches today to celebrate the diversity of practices globally.

[244] For issues concerning the dating of this document, see Bradshaw, 77-78.

preceded by one or two days of fasting.[245]

Notably, the *Didache* used the Trinitarian formula found in Matthew 28, rather than the Book of Acts' call to baptize "in the name of Jesus." This perhaps reflects the development in the church's understanding and expression of the Trinity. The *Didache* also required the convert to receive "a certain amount of teaching" before baptism could be administered, diverging from the immediate baptisms found in Acts.[246] Here, baptism was tied to an assent to a code of moral conduct, what Johnson describes as "pre-baptismal catechesis"; it was not merely a response to the preaching of the gospel.[247] The references to water imply that baptism was normally done by immersion, although pouring also was allowed.[248] Castleman notes that the instruction "includes both pattern and flexibility," allowing for leaders to practice baptism in a way that expressed the proper meaning of the ritual while leaving room for practices to develop in response to local factors, such as the availability of water.[249]

Later in the *Didache*, baptism was affirmed as a requirement for partaking in the Eucharistic meal.[250] Ferguson suggests that this affirmation reveals that

> baptism was not only adhesion to the Lord but also an admission to the community of his followers. Membership in the community of the Lord and a commitment to right conduct are the principal points of significance to baptism that can be deduced from what the *Didache* says.[251]

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[245] *Didache*, 7.1, 7.2, 7.4. Whitaker and Johnson, 2.

[246] Castleman, 154.

[247] Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 45.

[248] *Didache*, 7.3.

[249] Castleman, 151.

[250] *Didache*, 9.5.

[251] Ferguson, 203.

At this stage of development, baptism already was an expression of Christian identity: it marked being found in community with God and his people.

The *Didache* did not associate any specific day or time with the rite (e.g. Easter Vigil), prescribe the nature of the profession of faith other than hearing the teaching, include any requirements for the person performing the rite, or mention any practices other than water baptism that were to be associated baptism.[252] The *Didache* was a significant document for recognizing that the core elements of the baptismal rite were taking a simple yet consistent shape as the initiation ritual into the Christian community. This shape was still recognizable in the increasingly complicated ceremonies that would develop in the following centuries.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr, one of Christianity's early apologists, referred to baptism in his *First Apology* and *Dialogue with Trypho*, both dating from around 160.[253] Scholars debate whether Justin, in his explanations of the Christian faith to Emperor Antoninus Pius, was describing worship in the Roman church or in a Syrian church meeting in Rome. Similarities with the descriptions in the *Didache* on worship, along with added theological details, have convinced Johnson of a Syrian provenance.[254] In his *First Apology*, Justin referred to the act of water baptism as being "regenerated," a term describing the result of Spirit baptism. He connected this regeneration with Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus about being "born again,"[255] teaching that the washing with

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[252] Johnson, 46.

[253] Whitaker and Johnson, 3-4.

[254] Johnson, 49.

[255] John 3:5.

water was "illumination, since they who learn these things become illuminated intellectually."[256] Justin then described how the newly baptized join the assembly, "offer up sincere prayers in common," "greet one another with a kiss," and celebrate the Eucharist.[257] In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin further developed the meaning of baptism by describing Christ's baptism in the Jordan. According to Justin, it was not for Jesus' sake but for "humanity's sake" that Jesus was baptized and the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove.[258] Jesus' baptism allowed for other recipients to share in adoption as sons and daughters of God.

Tertullian

Tertullian converted to Christianity at the end of the second century in North Africa. He played a major role in the early battles over the doctrines of the Trinity and the natures of Christ. Tertullian wrote a seminal treatise on baptism, entitled *De Baptismo.*[259] Possibly intended for those preparing for baptism or for those having recently been baptized, *De Baptismo* contains the earliest verified reference to infant baptism. Tertullian did not condemn infant baptism outright, despite speaking of it negatively; instead, he advocated delaying baptism until the point when one can "learn how to ask for salvation."[260] As Ferguson points out, Tertullian's mention of infant baptism indicates that the practice was widespread enough to be acknowledged; at the same time, it was not

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[256] Whitaker and Johnson, 3.

[257] Ibid.

[258] Ibid., 3-4.

[259] Ibid., 9-11.

[260] *De Baptismo*, 18. Ibid., 10.

fully accepted, so Tertullian felt at liberty to speak against it.[261] Ferguson concludes that since Tertullian and his contemporaries viewed infants as being innocent at birth, they must have rejected the idea of baptism for the forgiveness of sins as incompatible with this view.[262]

Tertullian did not provide a complete depiction of baptism in a single document, so scholars today reconstruct the second-century baptismal ceremony from his various writings on renunciations, triple immersion, professions of faith, and post-baptismal anointing and laying of hands; some brief formula, possibly Trinitarian, said by the administrator; and a prayer over the water invoking the Holy Spirit.[263] Bradshaw notes that the innovation of invoking the Holy Spirit to sanctify the water was a result of moving baptisms from the "living water" of outdoor rivers and lakes to indoor baths and tanks.[264]

At the end of *De Baptismo*, Tertullian referred to the practice of baptism during Easter as especially significant because of the day's connection with the passion of Christ, signaling a possible shift in preference for the predominant meaning of baptism as tied to Christ's death and burial found in Romans 6. Despite this preference, he indicated that any day is fitting for a baptism: "If there is a difference of solemnity, it makes no difference to the grace."[265] Bradshaw notes that as it became the preferred date for baptisms, Easter was increasingly understood as a celebration of Christ's passage from

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[261] Ferguson, 363-366.

[262] Ibid., 365.

[263] Ibid., 340-345.

[264] Bradshaw, 156-157.

[265] *De Baptismo*, 19. Whitaker and Johnson, 10.

death to life rather than as a commemoration of his death. He then muses on whether the rise in Easter baptisms influenced this shift toward Romans 6 theology, or if the shift in emphasis brought about the practice.[266]

Hippolytus and the Apostolic Tradition

The *Apostolic Tradition* was initially dated ca. 215 and ascribed to Hippolytus, the Bishop of Rome in the early-third century. This dating and authorship played a large role in the twentieth-century scholarly hypothesis that consistent baptismal practices were established fairly early in the development of the church. For example, Aidan Kavanagh relied upon the early provenance of the *Apostolic Tradition* to ground his conclusions in his respected work *The Shape of Baptism*.

However, recent scholars have disproved this dating, concluding that the *Apostolic Tradition* was likely compiled over time, with portions dating from the mid-second century to the mid-fourth century, and that it drew from various geographical sources. As Johnson notes, "It is neither Hippolytan, Roman nor early third century . . . Hence, the 'tradition' of the *Apostolic Tradition* may well reflect a synthesis of various and diverse liturgical patterns and practices."[267] While the document likely reflects elements of early church practice, its later dating makes it difficult to assign it a fundamental role in the historical development of baptism.

In particular, the document's description of post-baptismal rites, including the laying on of hands, is recorded in the disputed portions of the extant text. [268] Therefore, most scholars today no longer believe these descriptions prove the early occurrence of

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[266] Bradshaw, 159.

[267] Whitaker and Johnson, xvi.

[268] For a discussion of the disputed texts, see Johnson, 96-110.

such practices that later led to the rite of confirmation.

Cyril of Jerusalem

As the location of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, Jerusalem was—and still is—an important pilgrimage site for Christians. In the fourth century, the church in Jerusalem played host to many visitors, who then would take the practices they observed back to their home congregations. This gave Jerusalem great influence over the life of the scattered church.

Egeria, a fourth-century pilgrim from Spain, recorded one example of these experiences in her diary following the Holy Week services in Jerusalem.[269] Egeria visited various worship sites that had been built on locations significant to Christians; these sites offered worshipers the opportunity to picture, vividly and first-hand, the days leading up to Christ's death. Notably, Egeria described the Easter Vigil when converts were baptized at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, erected at the site of Jesus' tomb. Following their baptism, converts recited the Creed in front of the tomb. This ritual drew a clear association between baptism and union with Christ's death.[270]

Cyril was Bishop of Jerusalem in the mid-fourth century. In 382, he delivered five *Mystagogical Catechesis*—catechetical lectures on the mysteries, or sacraments—during the week following the Easter baptism of new converts.[271] These sermons, which described each rite of initiation and elaborated on their various meanings, comprised the

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[269] For Egeria's diary, see Lester Ruth, Carrie Steenwyk, and John D. Witvliet, *Walking Where Jesus Walked: Worship in Fourth-Century Jerusalem*, The Church at Worship (Cambridge, UK; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 45-64.

[270] Rom. 6; Col. 2.

[271] Yarnold, 70-97.

first complete explanation of the baptismal rite.[272]

Cyril's first sermon described the required pre-baptismal actions, namely the renunciation of sin. Facing west—the region of darkness—the candidates were to renounce the power of sin and Satan.[273] Turning east, they declared their profession of faith in the Triune God.[274] Then, separated by gender, the candidates entered the baptistery and removed their garments.[275] Next, they were anointed with olive oil, which, Cyril explained, symbolized their becoming "sharers in Jesus Christ, who is the cultivated olive tree."[276] The baptism itself took place in the dark; the candidates were submerged under the water three times while pronouncing each of part of the Creed.[277] Cyril noted that this was a reenactment of the three days that Christ was buried in the tomb—and his words took on even more significance to his hearers since he was giving this sermon at the entrance to Christ's tomb.[278] After coming out of the waters, the candidates were again anointed with oil, this time as a seal of receiving the Holy Spirit in imitation of Christ's baptism.[279] The candidates then exited the baptistery and were received into the gathered community to partake in the Eucharist. Although Cyril did not directly reference receiving white garments following baptism, he implied it in his following sermon on the

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[272] Ferguson, 474.

[273] *Mystagogical Catechesis*, 1.2-8. Yarnold, 70-74.

[274] *Mystagogical Catechesis*, 1.9. Yarnold, 74-75.

[275] *Mystagogical Catechesis*, 2.2. Yarnold, 76-77.

[276] *Mystagogical Catechesis*, 2.3. Yarnold, 77. Ferguson claims this reveals Cyril's Christological emphasis. See Ferguson, 478.

[277] *Mystagogical Catechesis*, 2.4. Yarnold, 77-78.

[278] Ferguson, 478.

[279] *Mystagogical Catechesis*, 3.1. Yarnold, 81-82. Cf. Ferguson, 480.

Eucharist.[280]

Ambrose of Milan

Around 391, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, preached six sermons to new converts during the week following their baptisms at the Easter Vigil. Recorded and referred to as *de Sacramentis,* Ambrose's sermons unpacked the meaning of the sacramental rites of initiation.[281] Throughout his writings, Ambrose claimed to hold closely to the practices of Rome, except in the foot washing that followed baptism.[282] If his statements are credible, then his sermons offer a reasonably clear description of Roman practice at the end of the fourth century.[283] The *de Sacramentis* documents enable scholars today to reconstruct the order of baptism and interpret those practices that reflected the allegorical method dominant during Ambrose's time.[284]

There was significant liturgical development in the century following Tertullian. This can be seen in the post-baptismal portions of the rite, particularly in the words of the anointing prayer: "God the Father Almighty . . . who has brought you to a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit and has forgiven your sins, himself anoints you into eternal life."[285] This prayer illustrates two developments in Roman liturgy. First, it draws upon the image of new birth rather than the image of Christ's death.[286] Although the latter would become the dominant image of baptism in the West, this prayer continued to be

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[280] *Mystagogical Catechesis*, 4.8. Yarnold, 88-89.

[281] Yarnold, 100-149.

[282] *de Sacramentis*, 3.4-7. Yarnold, 121-123.

[283] For the problems with Ambrose's claims to Roman source, see Johnson, 169-175.

[284] *de Sacramentis*, 4.8. Yarnold, 98.

[285] *de Sacramentis*, 2.24. Whitaker and Johnson, 179.

[286] John 3; Titus 3; Rom. 6.

used throughout the period of the Medieval Church. Second, the placement of this prayer (the anointing followed the water baptism) implies that the gift of the Spirit is subsequent to the physical baptism, and that the new birth in the Spirit results from water baptism.

Ambrose described the giving of the Spirit following baptism as a "spiritual seal," but he did not state what he means by this or what action was associated with it.[287] In any case, his reference to the gift of the Spirit following baptism marks a shift from earlier church practice that associated the Spirit with the pre-baptismal anointing.[288] Ferguson cites another section of Ambrose's sermons, positing that the seal was the sign of the cross, since there was no mention of anointing with oil.[289] Johnson concludes that the seal would have been administered when the bishop administered the laying of hands, rather than by an anointing.[290] The rite was passed down, but, as Johnson notes, "Whatever Ambrose may have meant in his day by the 'Spiritual Seal,' later Ambrosian liturgical sources . . . exhibit nothing that could qualify as constituting this 'seal' liturgically."[291] Though it may have had an important meaning to Ambrose, the concept of "seal" was not attached to a specific act within the rite of initiation, and thus it became attached to practices that are perhaps misaligned with Ambrose's understanding of either the term or the practice.

Additional Observations

Bradshaw characterizes Eastern baptismal practices as dominantly Christ-oriented

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[287] *de Sacramentis*, 3.8. Yarnold, 124.

[288] Johnson, 138.

[289] *de Sacramentis*, 6.6-7. Ferguson, 640.

[290] Johnson, 175.

[291] Whitaker and Johnson, xvii.

and the Western approach as dominantly salvation-oriented. He supports his claim by pointing to the place that baptism held in the church's respective liturgical calendars: the East celebrated baptism during the Feast of Epiphany, which commemorated the baptism of Jesus, while the West baptized new believers during Easter, which commemorated the death and resurrection of Christ. The former placement was motivated by an emphasis on the union with Christ's incarnation; the latter by an emphasis on Christ's death and resurrection.[292]

Johnson, however, warns against this scholarly approach, claiming that it overemphasizes the differences between the earliest churches in the East and West. While regional emphases do distinguish various writers and documents, Johnson believes that there is no reason to conclude that the other elements and perspectives were not present.[293] Moreover, Johnson finds it unsatisfying to separate these early theological practices because both involved salvation and were rooted in the work of Christ. After comparing and contrasting the two baptismal practices, he suggests that both models were "equally Christological and Soteriological" and presents a different interpretive model: the Eastern model was "more imitative in nature, since the candidate [was] seen to *imitate* Christ in the Jordan somewhat literally"; whereas the Western model marked "a 'symbolic participation,' or even 'sacramental application' of salvation, since the candidate . . . [did] not literally act out a Passion play in the act of baptism."[294] Baptismal recipients in the East would have understood the rite as imitating Christ's baptism, while in the West they would have understood it as symbolically joining in Christ's death and

[292] Bradshaw, 155,159.

[293] Johnson, 112.

[294] Ibid., 113. Emphasis in original.

resurrection. Johnson's approach makes a connection between the practice and the theology of baptism, and he points out that "how one thinks of baptism will shape how one views Christian life and identity."[295] These distinctions in practice would have informed and shaped the lives of Christians and their communities.

Protestant Reformation 1500-1650

The Protestant Reformation took place in response to what the Reformers viewed as abuses of papal authority and was influenced by the fourteenth-century Renaissance. Intellectual and philosophical developments in Renaissance Europe precipitated a growing Christian Humanist movement that emphasized a return to the source documents of the faith. This meant reading the Bible in Greek and Hebrew, rather than using the Latin *Vulgate* that had been the standard text in the West since the late fourth century, and studying the writings of the early church fathers. In this way, Reformers led the charge to return to the original practices of the Church. Moreover, they placed the sacraments at the forefront of their reforms, believing that these practices were tangled up in misinterpretations of the means by which God dispenses grace to his people. These reforms played out in varying degrees depending on the theological and socio-political climates in various geographic regions.

This study will focus on three leading figures of the Reformation—Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin—as well as related individuals who both influenced and were influenced by them. The development in how these Reformers understood and applied baptismal theology can be traced throughout their theological writings and liturgical publications. Rejecting the Roman rite, each man continued to practice infant

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[295] Ibid.

baptism, but they defended the practice in different ways, and removed or truncated many liturgical aspects for varying reasons. Historian John Riggs notes that the Reformers were fighting on two fronts: they were arguing for the efficacy of the sacrament of baptism, counter to prevailing Medieval sacramental theology; and they were defending the validity of baptism itself against the claims of the Radical Reformation, or Anabaptist, movement.[296]

Medieval Church

In order to establish the context for Luther's sacramental reforms, it is necessary to survey the baptismal practices of the Medieval Church. In the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, baptism in the West was performed almost exclusively on infants. As historian Karen Spierling notes, "What began as a rite to initiate adult believers into the nascent Christian church developed, over several centuries, into a ritual centered upon a passive infant."[297] Children were baptized not long after birth out of fear that if they died before baptism, they "would be relegated to limbo rather than welcomed into heaven."[298] This reflected the scholastic developments in Augustine's theology of original sin.

Many times, when death was imminent, a midwife in the home rather than a priest in the church would baptize the infant. When the rite was performed at the church, the godparents (not the parents) would present the infant, a practice that possibly developed

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[296] John W. Riggs, *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 34.

[297] Karen E. Spierling, *Infant Baptism in Reformation Geneva: The Shaping of a Community, 1536-1564* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 32.

[298] Ibid.

from the custom of having sponsors at adult baptisms.[299] This was a private ceremony, with only family and godparents in attendance.

According to the Roman sacramental system, baptism caused regeneration and removed original sin from the recipient. The rite included exorcisms to banish the evil spirits believed to posses the child. In addition to the water, which was blessed before the baptism, the rite also featured salt, a white robe, oil for anointing, and a lighted taper. Spierling has found that many of these extra elements sprang from local customs that "found their way into church tradition," indicating "an overlap between social custom and the creation of Christian ceremony."[300] As these customs became standard inside the church, the elements were reimagined to give them a Christian meaning.

The Reformers consistently focused on removing these extra layers of ceremony and meaning in order to recover the essential form of the baptismal liturgy. They sought to make baptism public rather than private, and performed by pastors rather than midwives. Additionally, in many places the role of godparents began to recede as the natural parents (notably the father) became more involved in the rite.

Wittenberg – Luther

Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation in 1517 by posting his Ninety-Five Theses on the front door of his church in Wittenberg, Germany. His original intent was not to separate from the Church in Rome, but rather to reform the doctrines from within the Church. In fact, Luther's first liturgical reforms, published in 1523, were a reaction to the baptismal rites published by other reformers, not a reaction to Rome.[301] He

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[299] Ibid., 38.

[300] Ibid., 41.

[301] Spinks, 9.

significantly reworked his liturgy three years later; however, it still maintained the flow of the Roman liturgy.[302] According to Spinks, Luther intended his reforms to show, in his words, "the glory of baptism."[303] Luther removed most of the physical elements that he believed distracted from the glory of baptism, keeping only the element of water. And although he initially retained the exorcisms, he eventually reduced some and removed others altogether.

Luther's notable contribution to the baptismal liturgy was the *Sindflutgebet*, or Flood Prayer,[304] which historian Hughes Oliphant Old praises as a "masterpiece" of "biblical imagery, liturgical history, and pastoral sensitivity."[305] As Spinks points out, Luther echoed the themes found in early church baptismal writings.[306] In his prayer, he claimed that the primary purpose of baptism was washing away Adam's original sin. Luther referenced Noah and the Israelites' salvation from the waters of judgment, and then pronounced that all water, not just the Jordan, has been sanctified by the baptism of Christ. Finally, the *Sindflutgebet* called for the child to be baptized in order to be preserved in the "ark of Christendom," pointing to the incorporation of the child into the visible church. The *Sindflutgebet* became one of Luther's most influential works; other Reformation liturgies adopted its form and modified it for their own purposes.[307]

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[302] For both Luther's 1523 and 1526 publications, see John D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: The Reformation Period*, Alcuin Club Collections, no. 51 (London: SPCK, 1970), 6-16, 23-25.

[303] Spinks, 10-12.

[304] For the complete prayer, see Appendix B.

[305] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 37.

[306] Spinks, 12.

[307] Including the works of Bullinger, Ursinus, and Cranmer.

Zurich – Zwingli and Bullinger

Not long after Luther began his reforms in Germany, church leaders in other parts of Northern Europe began reforming worship as well. Insisting on grounding all sacramental practices in Scripture, early Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli stripped many elements from the Roman liturgy. Zwingli defined "sacrament" as a derivation of the Latin word for an oath or pledge taken by soldiers. Because of his understanding of the term, Zwingli believed that baptism was a sign, and conferred no spiritual change when water was applied physically.[308] According to Spinks, Zwingli viewed baptism as "something the Church does to show who its members are, and Christians do it to show they are Christians."[309] In other words, it was a rite of initiation into the visible community of the church. Zwingli continued to uphold infant baptism, likening it to the Old Testament practice of infant circumcision based upon the covenant relationship of the parents with God.[310] He opposed the Anabaptist contention that baptism was to be administered only upon profession of faith. Zwingli believed that restricting baptism to believers essentially was an attempt to create a church of the elect—which Zwingli disavowed since no human has the power to determine the elect.[311]

In a significant truncation of the Latin rite, Zwingli's baptism service consisted simply of naming the child, praying over the water, reading from Mark's Gospel, naming the child a second time, baptizing him or her in the Triune name, and presenting a white

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[308] Ulrich Zwingli, "Of Baptism," in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 131.

[309] Spinks, 32.

[310] Zwingli, 138-139.

[311] Lukas Vischer, *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 13-14.

robe.[312] In addition, Zwingli slightly modified Luther's prayer. Although he retained Lutheran references to Noah and the Red Sea, he omitted references to Christ's baptism and original sin. In an allusion to Romans 6, Zwingli referenced Christ's burial and resurrection. Yet he did not mention the child's incorporation into the Church, which is surprising considering his emphasis on this aspect of the covenant sign of baptism.[313]

After Zwingli died in 1531, his successor, Heinrich Bullinger, took the lead in developing covenant theology. Bullinger built upon Zwingli's interpretation of water as a sign and not an instrument, in contrast to Martin Bucer's and John Calvin's definitions of the sacraments.[314] According to Bullinger, applying water in baptism did not affect the inner work of the Spirit. Spinks notes this dualism in which "the inward and outward grace do not necessarily coincide . . . the two may happen, but not at the same time."[315] Spinks connects this with theologian Brian Gerrish's conception of "symbolic parallelism" regarding Zwingli and Bullinger's view of the Lord's Supper.[316]

Geneva – Calvin

John Calvin's sacramental theology strongly influences the Protestant church today. However, because Calvin worked under Martin Bucer's leadership in Strasbourg,

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[312] The title of this service sets forth his purpose: "Now follows the form of baptism which is now used in Zurich, and all the additions, which have no foundation in the word of God, have been removed." Fisher, 130-131.

[313] See Appendix B for full text.

[314] Spinks, 34.

[315] Ibid., 35.

[316] Cf. Brian A. Gerrish, "Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions," *Theology Today* 23, no. 2 (1966). Spinks succinctly connects Bullinger's baptismal theology with Gerrish's paradigm for differentiating the Eucharistic theology of Bullinger—"symbolic parallelism"—from Zwingli—"symbolic memorialism." However, Spinks fails to note a connection between Calvin's Eucharistic theology—"symbolic instrumentalism"—and baptismal theology. This may be the case because, at times, Calvin's theologies lack the precision of Bullinger's, but such an investigation is outside the scope of this study.

it is necessary to place Calvinist theology in the context of Bucer's work on liturgical reform. Over the years, Bucer attempted to find a middle ground between his two contemporaries, Luther and Zwingli. In 1524, he published *Grund und Ursach*, a liturgy that took a more Zwinglian approach to baptism.[317] Later in his career, Bucer was invited to assess the reforms of Thomas Cranmer in England and the first publications of the Book of Common Prayer. Spinks notes that at this time, Bucer's sacramental theology was shifting from strict dualism to one advocating a closer relationship between the external sign and the internal grace.[318]

John Calvin, Bucer's protégée, followed his mentor's trajectory as he developed his sacramental theology over the course of his career. The development of the themes dominating Calvin's sacramental theology mirrors the historical shape of his career.[319] Initially, during his first stay in Geneva, Calvin held closely to Luther's view of sign-promise. When he moved to Strasbourg, Calvin shifted to Zwingli's view of pledge and separating external and internal actions, although while Zwingli viewed baptism as a covenant sign of entrance into the community, Calvin viewed baptism primarily as a means of grace.[320] Upon his return to Geneva in 1541, he shifted to a middle ground between these two positions, focusing on God's covenant promises. In the years that followed, although Calvin refined his views, they remained essentially unchanged until the final publication of his *Institutes* in 1559.

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[317] Ottomar F. Cypris, "Basic Princples: Translation and Commentary of Martin Bucer's 'Grund Und Ursach,' 1524" (Th.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1971), 166-182.

[318] Spinks, 37.

[319] Riggs traces this development with each publication of Calvin's *Institutes*. Riggs, 41-51.

[320] Vischer, 21.

Liturgical theologian John Witvliet notes that most recent scholarship has placed Calvin's baptismal theology in the context of Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Anabaptist views.[321] This is at least partially the case because much of Calvin's own work was in direct response to these groups. However, it also is due to the fact that there is no comprehensive way of describing Calvin's theology.[322] Upon noting this difficulty, biblical theologian Ronald Wallace claims that Calvin viewed baptism as an ingrafting into Christ.[323] This apt metaphor centers on the work of Christ in accomplishing the myriad aspects of redemption, all of which are signified in baptism. To this same end, Witvliet calls Calvin's view on baptism "a cornerstone of the Christian life."[324] Baptism holds together the double grace of justification and sanctification, an ongoing theme for Calvin. These two descriptions of the state of the redeemed Christian are to be distinguished from each other—for they describe different aspects of redemption—and united together—for they exist concurrently in the Christian life, and are thus a source of assurance.[325]

Calvin's contemporaries challenged his views on both the validity and efficacy of baptism.[326] Alluding to those who received baptism without yet being part of the invisible

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[321] John D. Witvliet, "Baptism as a Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Thought of John Calvin," in *Worship Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 150.

[322] Calvin writes on the sacraments generally and baptism specifically in *Institutes*, 4.14-16. His views on baptism arise throughout his commentaries and treatises.

[323] Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), 175-183.

[324] Witvliet, 150.

[325] "Their distinction clarifies why the Christian believer must struggle against the insidious power of sin, even after the once-for-all saving work of Jesus Christ. Their inseparability provides the believer with assurance that this very struggle is a part of God's saving action in the world." Ibid., 152.

[326] Riggs, 60-70.

church, opponents questioned whether baptism should be offered to the reprobate or those predestined to damnation.[327] In response, Calvin appealed to God's primary activity in salvation, which allows the benefits of baptism to be received by faith.[328] His opponents also challenged infant baptism, questioning what effect baptism plays in the lives of those unable to comprehend or profess faith. Calvin's defense of infant baptism rested firmly on covenant theology: the connection between baptism and the sign of circumcision.[329] However, while Calvin ostensibly addressed these contradictions in his own time, modern scholars challenge the overall coherence of his theology, particularly concerning infant baptism. For example, in his examination of the historical development of Calvin's theology, Wright finds unresolved tension in the *Institutes*' chapters on baptism, including infant baptism.[330] To solve this apparent lack of clarity, historian Jill Raitt identifies three principles drawn from Calvin's sacramental theology and broader theological system that guided his understanding of infant baptism.[331] These principles express a view that is consistent with Calvin's sacramental theology even if it was not stated expressly in reference to infant baptism: those who experience the benefits of Christ contained in baptism do so through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The evolution in Calvin's thoughts on baptism is particularly evident in his

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[327] For Calvin's views on election and effectual calling, see *Institutes*, 3.21-24.

[328] *Institutes*, 4.14.14-17.

[329] *Institutes*, 4.16.

[330] David F. Wright, "Development and Coherence in Calvin's *Institutes*: The Case of Baptism (*Institutes* 4:15-4:16)," in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective: Collected Studies*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 235.

[331] Jill Raitt, "Three Inter-Related Principles in Calvin's Unique Doctrine of Infant Baptism," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 11, no. 1 (1980). These principles are: 1. Christ and his benefits are distinct but not separate. 2. Christ and his benefits are offered to all but received only by those gifted with faith by the Holy Spirit. 3. The mind illumined by the Holy Spirit through the gift of faith is stimulated by the Word and the analogy presented in sacramental action.

baptismal liturgy. While Calvin first published the *Institutes* in 1536 and edited and revised them until their final publication in 1559, he published his baptismal rite in 1540 and 1542 and made no substantial changes in successive publications.[332] Spinks notes that Calvin adapted his liturgy from William Farel's service in Strasbourg and added some changes to employ a more positive theology of baptism.[333] His baptism liturgy was included in the *Genevan Psalter* of 1542.[334] In the preliminary section of the baptism liturgy, Calvin stated that baptisms should take place on any day when there was a service with a sermon. Old notes that this was more of a compromise than a strongly held position on Calvin's part, and that he would have preferred baptisms to be performed during the morning service on the Lord's Day.[335] Calvin heavily weighted the rest of the order toward teaching, giving it half of the written text of his liturgy. After the opening portions of the service, the pastor was to explicate the meaning of baptism as it fit within the scope of salvation. Calvin also included commentary on biblical texts related to his understanding of infant baptism in his liturgy's exhortation.[336] He then laid out the invocation prayer, highlighting God's mercy, his covenantal promises, the remission of original sin through justification, and the ongoing work of the Spirit through sanctification.[337] After the prayer came the parents' vows, in which they claimed the

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[332] Bryan D. Spinks, "Calvin's Baptismal Theology and the Making of the Strasbourg and Genevan Baptismal Liturgies 1540 and 1542," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 48, no. 1 (1995): 57.

[333] "Whereas Farel is concerned to explain the limitations of the human rite . . . For Calvin, baptism is an objective sign which God gives us, and it may mediate grace, because the initiative is God's. Calvin is concerned to emphasise [sic] that God does not give empty signs." Ibid., 73.

[334] For a description and translation of this order, see Old, 171-176.

[335] Ibid., 173.

[336] Gen. 17:7-9; 1 Cor. 7:14; Matt. 19:13-15.

[337] For full text of this prayer, see Appendix B.

Christian faith as their own and pledged to raise the child in the teaching of that faith. The child was then named, followed by baptism in pure water while speaking the Triune name. After the text of the liturgy, Calvin directed the minister to speak "in full voice and in the common language of the people."[338] With this rubric, along with the practice of placing the baptismal font near or below the pulpit, Calvin emphasized the importance of the congregation understanding the sacrament clearly.[339]

There is a didactic accent in Calvin that is common throughout Reformed liturgies. Spinks describes this is as theology "by explication" instead of by liturgical form and content.[340] He posits that this stems from the effects of Medieval scholasticism upon the "theological self-consciousness" of the Protestant Reformers.[341] However, while this pre-Reformation theological undercurrent did exert an inescapable influence on Calvin and other Reformed theologians, they also may have been looking to early church practices to justify their didacticism. In fact, Witvliet suggests that Calvin was attempting to recover the post-baptismal catechumenate of the early church through his baptismal liturgy and his calls for regular post-baptismal catechizing; Witvliet goes so far as to call it mystagogical catechesis.[342] According to Mikoski, Calvin's service intentionally functions as "ecclesial pedagogy," taking each service of baptism as an opportunity to instruct the church in the meaning of their previously received baptism. The teaching was

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[338] Quoted in Old, 175.

[339] Mikoski, 153.

[340] "However rich a theology contained in an explication or a sermon, unless this finds a counterpart in the liturgical prayers and formulae, its impact is muted. A meagre liturgy suggests a meagre sacrament." Spinks, "Calvin's Baptismal Theology and the Making of the Strasbourg and Genevan Baptismal Liturgies 1540 and 1542," 74.

[341] Spinks, *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, 50.

[342] Witvliet, 159.

not meant for the immediate recipients of baptism, as infants are unable to understand, but for the congregation present at the ceremony.[343]

England – Westminster Assembly

The English Reformation occurred later than the Continental Reformation, mainly because Henry VIII broke with Rome before Luther and other Reformers began circulating their work. In 1549, Thomas Cranmer published his first Book of Common Prayer as an English translation and reinterpretation of the Roman liturgy. Criticized by Protestants as too conservative a reform and by Catholics as too Protestant, he published a revision not long after, in 1552. The BCP went through further revisions, but this second edition substantially reduced the baptismal liturgy, a reform that was carried through until the 1662 revision. The Reformed baptismal liturgies were characterized by exhortation and didacticism, but Spinks notes the "narrative element" in Cranmer's liturgy: it walked through the steps of the Christian life, from remission of sins (justification), to dying to sin (sanctification), and to the life everlasting (glorification).[344]

In 1643, nearly a century after the first BCP edition was published, Parliament convened the Westminster Assembly. The members of the assembly, known as Divines, were composed of various groups opposed to the Church of England and—notably—to the BCP. The Divines were heavily influenced by John Knox, who had established the Church of Scotland in 1560 upon returning from exile in mainland Europe. While in Geneva, Knox studied under Calvin and absorbed his theology, and he brought the Genevan Psalter with him back to Scotland. Calvin's theology permeated the Scots

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[343] Mikoski, 183.

[344] Bryan D. Spinks, "Vivid Signs of the Gift of the Spirit: The Lima Text on Baptism and Some Recent English Language Baptismal Liturgies," *Worship* 60, no. 3 (1986): 71.

Confession of 1560, and although Knox himself died long before the Westminster Assembly, his influence—and Calvin's—can be seen in the development of baptismal theology in the Westminster Standards.

Much of the internal debate over baptism at Westminster was focused on practical rather than theological aspects—such as whether the rite should be performed in a public or private setting.[345] The Divines were so focused on finding a scriptural warrant for the practice that, as Wright notes, they did not prioritize the relationship between Word and sacrament. This, Wright believes, would have resolved the public-private debate.[346] Theologian Thomas F. Torrance agrees with Wright, affirming that neither the Confession nor the Catechisms connected the audible Word and the visible Word of the sacraments as seals of the gospel.[347]

Scholars today disagree about what the Westminster Divines believed concerning the instrumental nature of the sacraments. The Divines, according to Torrance, did not claim the sacraments effected what they signified. [348] However, according to Letham, Torrance ignores the Divines' own words about how the Holy Spirit confers the grace "exhibited" in the sacrament. [349] Letham believes that the Westminster Standards adhered to Calvin's view of the instrumental nature of the sacraments, and criticizes what he sees

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[345] For the development of the Reformed Doctrine of Baptism from Calvin to Westminster, see Letham, 333-339.

[346] Wright, "Baptism at the Westminster Assembly," 177.

[347] Thomas F. Torrance, "Westminster Tradition," in *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John Mcleod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 146.

[348] Ibid., 148.

[349] WCF 27.3. Concerning the original meaning of "exhibited" in Westminster and the Reformers, see Wright, "Baptism at the Westminster Assembly," 167-168; David F. Wright, "Infant Baptism and the Christian Community in Bucer," in *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective: Collected Studies* (Milton Keynes, UK; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2007), 170-172.

as "universalist undertones" in Torrance's assessment.[350] But Letham's own critique falls short: he claims that Torrance's analysis of WLC does not engage with adoption, but Torrance includes a discussion of just this topic.[351] To return to the subject of instrumentalism, Wright notes the Confession's nuanced view of baptism: it stated that the benefits of the sacrament are received fully by those who are "worthy receivers."[352] Moreover, theologian C. John Collins points out that while evangelical Presbyterians today believe that nothing happens when non-worthy receivers are baptized, this was not true for the Divines. Instead, they claimed that baptism joins both the elect and the non-elect "to the people of God, and in this way to Christ himself, and thus ushers [them] into a web of relationships and influences through which [they] may participate in the life of Christ mediated through the people of God."[353] In other words, even if baptism does not convey salvation to the non-elect, it still brings other benefits.

The issue of infant baptism is another aspect scholars dispute today. Wright criticizes the Divines' approach to express scriptural warrant in the debate over parental profession of faith. The majority of the Assembly voted to require a parental affirmation of faith by creedal questions, but Parliament ultimately struck the vows and replaced them with a requirement that the parents promise to perform their duty. To Wright, these deliberations reflected centuries of infant baptism rather than believer's baptism as the norm in the church.[354] While this may be a valid assessment, Wright's conclusion that the

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[350] Letham, 324; 343-44.

[351] Torrance, 147-148.

[352] WCF 27.3.

[353] C. John Collins, "What Does Baptism Do for Anyone? Part II: Additional Studies," *Presbyterion* 38, no. 2 (2012): 79.

[354] Wright, "Baptism at the Westminster Assembly," 172.

Divines devalued the sacrament of baptism by privileging infant baptism is misleading. Riggs notes that by the time of Westminster, the covenant defense of infant baptism was so prominent that the Confession used a shorthand formula for indicating that children of believing parents should be baptized.[355] Covenant theology arose in response to misunderstandings about baptism, and Westminster carried on this heritage.

The earlier discussion of improving baptism brings the effective appropriation of baptism to the foreground. Most commentators on the Westminster Assembly reference and affirm WLC 167, an indication of its unique and enduring contribution to the larger discussion of baptism. This catechism question was not concerned with explicating the theological and historical differences over baptism (like other Reformed confessions do), but rather applied the meaning of baptism by faith to the Christian life, which, as Ross notes, conveys how baptism is understood as a means of grace.[356] Reformation theology emphasized that God was the primary actor in baptism; in this vein, the Westminster Divines sought to define human action in light of God's gracious action.

The "Directory for the Public Worship of God" outlined Westminster's baptismal liturgy, applying the theology laid out in the Confession and Catechisms.[357] The DPW allowed pastors liberty of expression in order to avoid binding the consciences of congregants, and the baptismal liturgy followed this reasoning. Worship historian James White notes this characteristic as one distinction between the Puritans and their

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[355] Riggs, 85. Cf. WCF 28.4.

[356] Ross, "Improving the Means of Grace," 424.

[357] For the full text from the DPW on baptism, see Appendix B.

Continental Reformed counterparts.[358] To protect congregational autonomy in liturgical decisions, pastors were not restricted to the forms of prayer set by the BCP; they were allowed to pray and speak about the immediate needs of the local congregation. White points out that in this tradition, "relevance really ha[d] a priority almost equal to biblical authority, so that relevance and authenticity [were] united."[359] This reveals a striking paradox in Puritanism: the Bible is the sole authority over and against church tradition in matters of theology and practice, but the pastor and local congregation are given exclusive power to incorporate that theology and practice.

The Divines, believing that this was Calvin's intent, sought to justify all their practices with direct biblical warrant. Yet, as theologian J.I. Packer points out, this was an over-reading of Calvin, who was more concerned with removing those ceremonies that had been tainted by false theology and superstition.[360] Historian Horton Davies notes that one example of the Puritans' departure from Calvin is their "radical opposition" to set forms of prayer.[361] Even as they attempted to follow in Calvin's footsteps, the Puritans established worship innovations contrary to his practices.

God's covenant was emphasized throughout the DPW's baptismal ceremony.

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[358] James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 119-120.

[359] Ibid., 119.

[360] "The idea that direct biblical warrant, in the form of precept or precedent, is required to sanction every substantive item included in the public worship of God was in fact a Puritan innovation, which crystallised [sic] out in the course of the prolonged debates that followed the Elizabethan settlement. . . . (W)hen they challenged the principle that each church has liberty to ordain non-biblical ceremonies in worship where these seem conducive to edification and reverence, . . . they were not in fact reverting to Calvin, but departing from him, though, . . . it is doubtful whether they realised [sic] this." J. I. Packer, "The Puritan Approach to Worship," in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 247-248.

[361] Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), 48.

Baptism of adult converts was conspicuously absent; only infants were described as subjects of baptism.[362] Preceding the rite, the pastor was to give words of instruction regarding baptism. The DPW provided an example, yet directed the pastor to use his own wisdom to speak to the "ignorance and errors" in baptismal doctrine and for the "edification of the people."[363] He then was to admonish the congregation to "look back to their baptism," and exhort the parents to raise their child "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."[364] Following this lengthy period of instruction, the ceremony would proceed: a prayer for the sanctification of the water, the naming of the child, baptism by pouring or sprinkling water on the child in the Triune name, and a concluding prayer that gave thanks for God's covenant and requested God's continued work in the child's life toward faith in Christ.

Though the DPW was to guide instead of restrain pastors in various aspects of leading worship, the provided prayers undeniably were meant to shape the congregation's understanding of baptism. For example, Wright notes that the suggested prayer before the baptism appealed to the Lord to "join the inward baptism of his Spirit with the outward baptism of water," thus requesting the grace of the sacrament be conveyed to the recipient.[365]

Conclusion

This section of the study has traced the development of baptismal practice and

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[362] This was also true for Calvin's, Knox's, and the BCP's liturgies. Wright notes that the 1662 revision of the BCP addresses this by expressly including adults. Wright, "Baptism at the Westminster Assembly," 236.

[363] Dickson, 383.

[364] Ibid.

[365] Wright, "Baptism at the Westminster Assembly," 169.

theology from its state at the beginning of the Reformation to its culmination in the Westminster Assembly, which, Wright notes, has "to a major degree shaped baptismal understanding and practice in the Reformed churches in the West."[366] The study now moves to the modern era to evaluate the currents and changes in baptismal practice of churches today.

Modern Day 1900-present

Churches continued to refine and reform their worship practices in the modern era, responding to both theological progress and cultural forces. Global revulsion at the devastation of World Wars I and II prompted attempts to create peace between nations, which in turn stimulated an ecumenical movement of churches seeking to find unity across national and denominational boundaries. As they uncovered more and more early church documents, scholars called churches to adopt and adapt ancient practices into their current ones.[367] However, not all theologians believed this had a positive effect. Karl Barth and others decried infant baptism, correlating it with the decline of Christendom in Western Europe—a decline that also coincided with the disenchantment with the Church that occurred during the World Wars.[368]

It is amidst these streams of influence that churches find themselves today. To assess the current state of baptism, this study will look briefly at the ecumenical movement, analyze how the movement influenced the publication of a multi-denominational Presbyterian worship book, and examine how two other Presbyterian

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[366] Ibid., 177.

[367] Specifically for baptism, primary works include Cullmann; Jeremias. Much of today's scholarship on baptism is in response to these mid-century works.

[368] Barth describes infant baptism as "the wound from which the Church suffers." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Clarke, 1969), 194.

churches, uninfluenced by the ecumenical dialogue, have maintained their baptismal practices.

World Council of Churches and BEM

Beginning with the Faith and Order Conference in 1927, an ecumenical movement of churches began working toward the visible unity of the worldwide church. The World Council of Churches was established a decade later; its purpose was to establish visible unity for the sake of mission.[369] In 1982, the WCC published its culminating work, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. The writers of BEM assert that if visible unity is to be achieved, then "basic agreement" must be reached in the particular areas of Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry.[370] Their goal is to address the barriers standing between churches, in the hopes of achieving "mutual recognition leading to unity."[371]

Regulating the rite of baptism itself is a primary concern for the denominations attempting to reach mutual recognition, but variations in local congregations present a barrier to unity in ecumenical dialogue. These local variations are common across denominations, because, according to Westerfield Tucker, "Liturgies are living events, not just words on a page."[372] A denomination's official documents are unable to express the diverse expressions that develop over time in local congregations and their surrounding culture. Westerfield Tucker points out the challenge this presents for "ecumenical conversation and the prospect of mutual recognition," since these relations

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[369] World Council of Churches, "WCC Constitution and Rules," October 30, 2013, accessed October 12 https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/wcc-constitution-and-rules.

[370] BEM, v.

[371] BEM, vii.

[372] Westerfield Tucker, 220.

are based on the official documents and not the local expressions.[373] However, Meyendorff notes that although the variety of baptismal practices and theologies pose challenges for mutual recognition, "baptism [offers] various possibilities for churches to recognize one another as being Christian, short of having achieved full communion."[374] Despite their differences, churches find unity around baptism as the basis for their shared faith—a unity that has yet to be found around the Lord's Supper.

BEM draws attention to the theme of incorporation of believers and their children into the body of Christ and claims that divisions over baptism reveals the lack of unity in churches today.[375] The writers conclude, "The need to recover baptismal unity is at the heart of the ecumenical task as it is central for the realization of genuine partnership within the Christian communities."[376] Unity will be achieved as churches come together around one baptism.

The writers draw attention to the "variety of forms" of baptism practiced throughout history—whether infant baptism, believer's baptism, chrismation, or confirmation—and specifically note that rebaptism is discouraged.[377] They point out that the debate over believer and infant baptism poses a specific challenge to mutual recognition and outward unity. To that end, they recommend that proponents of believer's baptism be explicit about the benefits for children growing up in the church community, and that practitioners of infant baptism take care in raising their children

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[373] Ibid.

[374] Meyendorff, 195.

[375] BEM, Commentary on 6.

[376] BEM, Commentary on 6.

[377] BEM, 11-14.

with the goal of expressing faith in Christ.[378]

Although they do not offer a complete liturgy, in the last section of BEM, the writers suggest important elements that contribute to a rich celebration of baptism. They advocate the use of vivid symbols, such as immersion—signifying participation in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection—and the laying on of hands and chrismation—signifying the gift of the Spirit.[379] Their "comprehensive order of baptism" includes the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the renunciation of evil.[380] They advocate unpacking the meaning of baptism from the scriptures in order to correct "misunderstandings encouraged by the socio-cultural context in which baptism takes place."[381] The local customs of the church should guard against cultural understandings that are contrary to the meaning of baptism. Finally, they advise churches to celebrate baptism in the context of public worship, recommending in particular the feast days of Easter, Pentecost, and Epiphany, as was the practice of the early church.[382]

The Presbyterian Book of Common Worship

BEM has been adopted in various forms by affiliated denominations in the intervening years since its completion.[383] In fact, many mainline American denominations published new worship books based on it in the latter half of the twentieth century. However, when adapting its recommendations into practice, many churches have

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[378] BEM, 16.

[379] BEM, 18, 19.

[380] BEM, 20.

[381] BEM, Commentary on 21.

[382] BEM, 23.

[383] For an assessment of BEM and various denominational responses, see Thomas F. Best, ed. *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008).

found it difficult to strike the right balance between the text's ecumenical form and content and their own theology and traditions.[384] The Presbyterian Book of Common Worship, published by the PC(USA) and Cumberland Presbyterian denominations, highlights these difficulties.[385]

The BCW introduces two baptism liturgies. The first is more influenced by the ecumenical movement; the second is more reflective of the services passed down through Presbyterian and Reformed traditions. Riggs assesses these services in light of Reformed baptismal theology, which he characterizes as focusing on the covenant, expressed primarily by God's gracious promises and secondarily by humanity's response to those promises. Reformed baptismal theology focuses principally on God's gracious action; the BCW ceremony switches the focus to humanity's response to the covenant.[386] In its structure, the rite is highlighted by "liturgical dialogue" between the minister and the congregation. The first outright address to God is in the prayer over the water.

According to Presbyterian theologian Martha Moore-Keish, the Reformed baptismal discussion reveals a tension between giving priority to God's grace and not minimizing the human response to that offer. The BCW's description of the structure of the services reveals two examples of this tension, in the prayer over the water and in the placement of the baptismal ritual relative to the sermon. In the first liturgy, the prayer over the water comes after the renunciations and the creed; in the second liturgy, it comes

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[384] "If one examines the baptismal liturgies recently published by various denominations, one can detect promising points of convergence amid the welter of variation. Common to all these liturgies is a certain fixed shape, a vital use of the images of water and oil to explicate the act and intention of baptism, and a tendency to favor pictorial narration over didactic explanation in describing the baptismal event." John Weborg, "How Books of Worship Say and Do Baptism," *Interpretation* 47, no. 3 (1993): 267.

[385] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993).

[386] For a full critique of the BCW and suggested emendations, see Riggs, 105-119.

before. As Moore-Keish points out, "The latter emphasizes . . . the presence of salvific grace prior to promise making, while the first . . . accents the nature of repentance and conversion as the spiritual posture called for in the presence of such grace."[387] The BCW's Reformed emphasis is made plain in the second liturgy, but it is downplayed in the first.

The placement of baptism in the liturgy also exposes this tension. The BCW, which maintains the historic initiation shape of baptism, confirmation, and communion, dictates that baptism follows the sermon. This emphasizes baptism as a response to God's Word, a lean toward the Reformed priority. However, Moore-Keish points out that many congregations follow practices that predate the publication of the BCW. In addition to a shorter liturgy of baptism, for practical reasons these practices include performing baptism prior to the sermon.[388] For Moore-Keish, this example highlights how ecumenical discussions may lead congregations into practices more in line with their professed theological standards. In contrast, Riggs laments the placement of baptism after the sermon. He does not believe it should be placed elsewhere in the service, but he claims that this otherwise proper placement is rendered confusing when the structure of the baptismal liturgy focuses on the human activity within baptism instead of on God's gracious calling to the waters.[389]

The language of this rite also demonstrates an ecumenical influence: it explains baptism in light of the Great Commission, further reflecting the liturgical dialogue of

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[387] Martha Moore-Keish, "Baptism in the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition," in *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, ed. Thomas F. Best (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 65.

[388] Ibid., 67.

[389] Riggs, 107.

baptismal commands. Westerfield Tucker explains that churches may find unity in using the Great Commission as the foundational text for baptismal practice, despite conflicting interpretations of how it is to be applied.[390] She notes that the Great Commission ties baptism and evangelization together, links baptism with professing faith in the Trinity, and calls for connecting formation and learning with obedience.[391] Recognizing these commonalities demonstrates that there is convergence among churches today regarding baptism. According to Tucker, when churches unite around Jesus' final assurance in the Great Commission—that he will be present with them "to the end of the age"—the ecumenical task is advanced. [392]

In contrast, Riggs calls for taking the readings from Genesis and Acts instead of from Matthew 28, in order to ground the baptismal ceremony in covenant theology.[393] He also suggests adding a reading from the beginning of Mark's Gospel before the ceremony of baptism, to emphasize that the adoption of the recipient as a daughter or son has already occurred prior to the outward act.[394] Concurring with Riggs, Presbyterian theologian James F. Kay points out that a covenant context for baptism in the BCW scripture readings is "glaringly missing"; there is no reference to the inherent proof of infant baptism based on covenant promises.[395]

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[390] Westerfield Tucker, 213.

[391] Ibid.

[392] Ibid., 222.

[393] Riggs, 107-108.

[394] Mark 1:9-11.

[395] James F. Kay, "The New Rites of Baptism: A Dogmatic Assessment," in *To Glorify God: Essays on Modern Reformed Liturgy*, ed. Bryan D. Spinks and Iain R. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 203.

Similarly, Riggs analyzes the three options the BCW provides for the Prayer of Thanksgiving. The first two come from the ecumenical movement and contain no overt reference to the covenant. The third option is for the officiant to compose an original prayer; the BCW gives suggestions on how to structure this prayer. Of these three options, Riggs argues that only the third reflects a Reformed baptismal theology, as it prompts the minister to emphasize the covenantal aspects of baptism.[396]

Similar to exercising pastoral liberty regarding prayers, Moore-Keish notes that despite official denominational guidelines, many churches on a local level continue practices that predate BEM and other denominational worship books influenced by it.[397] For example, some congregations drop the prayer over the water in favor of praying for the recipient of baptism, calling on the Holy Spirit to work in the life of the individual rather than to bless the water.[398] Additionally, many congregations use an infant baptismal prayer from the French Reformed liturgy that emphasizes God's gracious action prior to faith.[399]

Another local variation away from BCW, noted by Moore-Keish, regards the renunciations of sin. Some congregations are wary of the renunciations, seeing them as an innovation in Presbyterian worship and beginning to verge on "semi-Pelagianism, implying that human actions precede—and even prompt—the action of God."[400] Even more than an innovation, the renunciations reflect an opposing theology that these

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[396] Riggs, 110-111.

[397] Moore-Keish, 65.

[398] Ibid.

[399] Ibid., 66. For a version of this prayer, see Appendix B.

[400] Ibid., 65.

congregations wish to avoid. Rather than incorporating or even modifying the renunciations, they omit them altogether.

In their attempts to join Presbyterian and Reformed worship practices with the ecumenical convergence over baptism, the writers of the BCW have produced a useful example for congregations seeking to adopt practices broader than their own tradition. However, congregations would do well to assess the implications of such changes by examining the theological bases of these practices. In Kay's critique of the BCW, he claims that the writers are aligning with the church of late antiquity instead of the Protestant era because they are "less confident in the power of the Reformation to speak today."[401]

PCA and the Book of Church Order

Having considered the influence of BEM on the BCW, the study now turns to the texts of two evangelical and theologically conservative Presbyterian denominations. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP) continue the practices inherited from past generations, but have not participated in the ecumenical liturgical renewal movement.

The PCA adheres to the Westminster Standards; therefore, the denomination's baptismal theology reflects the covenant theology present in Reformed traditions. The baptism ceremony is described in the denomination's Book of Church Order, and represents the practice of American Presbyterian churches since the American Revolution.[402] With the Westminster Standards as its backdrop, the structure of the

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[401] Kay, 212.

[402] Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, "The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America," Presbyterian Church in American Administrative

service in the BCO is largely congruent with the DPW's. The BCO does not spell out much of the content of the baptism service, allowing the DPW to guide it. One addition in the BCO, however, is a set of vows to be taken by the parents at the baptism of their child.[403] The third and final vow asks:

> 3. Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him), that you will teach (him) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (him) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?[404]

On the surface, this vow reflects the influence of covenant theology: children are to be raised in light of the covenant relationship between God and families. However, Ross questions whether this vow is introducing a practice not in accordance with the theology of infant baptism.[405] As part of the committee tasked with writing a worship directory for the ARP, Ross finds the term "dedicate" to be potentially troublesome, especially when compared with churches that practice infant dedication instead of baptism. The corresponding vow in the ARP Directory states that the parents "covenant and promise" rather than "dedicate."[406] Earlier in the ARP Directory, the term "dedicate" is addressed directly: "The baptism of children is not intended as a sign of their parents' faith. Nor is it an act of dedication by the parents, giving up their child to God and seeking from God a

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Committee, 2014, accessed March 18, 2015 http://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2014-BCO-Reprint-ALL.pdf.

[403] See note above regarding the absence of vows in DPW.

[404] BCO, 56.5.

[405] Noted in an email correspondence with the author on September 26, 2014.

[406] "Do you now covenant and promise in humble reliance on the grace of God to bring up your child to love God and to serve Him, to the end that your child may come to commit his life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?" General Synod, "The Directory of Public Worship for the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church," The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, 2007, accessed March 18, 2015 http://arpchurch.org/documents/directory-of-public-worship/.

blessing upon their child."[407]

Brownson notes a disconnect between infant dedication and baptism that "grates against *both* the theology of believer baptism and the Reformed theology of infant baptism."[408] Many churches that do not practice infant baptism substitute infant dedication in its place, yet Brownson points out that dedication in these contexts goes against the theology of baptism held by credobaptist congregations.[409] The problem lies in the nature of who is performing the act of dedication. A mother can only dedicate herself to God, not her child. At this point, the earlier discussion of sacrament versus ordinance—whether the ritual is centered on the action of God or of humans—comes into play. According to Brownson, "infant dedication . . . lacks sufficient grounding in the covenant promise of God. It becomes a merely human action, rather than a human response to God's promise and claim."[410] In other words, at their roots, baptism and dedication are actions with different intent and orientation.

This raises the question about the origins of the language in the PCA vow. Was it an oversight by the original body composing the vows? If the vows were taken and modified from an existing source, what was the intent of this language? If the language of dedication goes against the covenant purposes of baptism, then why is this word used to

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[407] Ibid., 309. Stated positively, "The commitment which has been laid upon us in baptism is laid upon us by God himself, not by believing parents." Ross, "Improving the Means of Grace: The Larger Catechism on Spiritual Growth," 431.

[408] Brownson, 203. Emphasis in original.

[409] "Some believer baptists [sic] object that it weakens their clear emphasis that a decision for or against the gospel can be made only by an individual; no one else can make that decision for you. Infant dedication, in this view, threatens to compromise the unique responsibility of the individual to confess faith. No one can 'dedicate' someone else to God; we can only dedicate ourselves to God in response to the gospel." Ibid., 202-203.

[410] Ibid., 203.

represent the parental action in baptism for the PCA and other American Presbyterian churches?[411]

According to documents from the PCA Historical Center, the wording of the vows of infant baptism in present use has remained largely intact since their first appearance in the 1894 Directory.[412] The 1885 Directory, which immediately preceded the 1894 version, did not contain the word "dedicate."[413]

The term "dedicate" occurs a second time in the BCO, in the chapter entitled "Covenant Children" which begins: "Believers' children within the Visible Church, and especially those dedicated to God in Baptism . . ."[414] This language dates back to the original documents of American Presbyterianism, the PCUSA's 1789 Directory for Worship.[415] The first American Presbyterians took their lead from both the Westminster Standards and the Genevan Book of Order, but there is no instance of the term "dedicate" concerning infants or baptism in either of these documents.[416] The term "present" is used in the Genevan Book, which could be construed as a similar action to "dedicate." The

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[411] The Evangelical Presbyterian Church uses the same vows verbatim (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, "The Book of Order of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church," Office of the General Assembly, 2014, accessed March 18, 2015 http://www.epc.org/file/main-menu/resources/download-epc-doc/Book-of-Order-2014-15-WEB.pdf.), whereas the Orthodox Presbyterian Church uses the term "endeavor" in the corresponding vow for parents (Orthodox Presbyterian Church, "The Directory for the Public Worship of God," The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2015, accessed March 18, 2015, http://opc.org/BCO/DPW.html.).

[412] PCA Historical Center, "Historical Development of the PCA Book of Church Order: Chapter 56, Paragraph 5," pcahistory.org,2007, accessed March 18, 2015, http://www.pcahistory.org/bco/dfw/56/05.html.

[413] Ibid.

[414] BCO 57.1.

[415] PCA Historical Center, "Historical Development of the PCA Book of Church Order: Chapter 57, Paragraph 1," pcahistory.org, 2007, accessed March 18, 2015, http://www.pcahistory.org/bco/dfw/57/01.html.

[416] John Calvin, "The Genevan Book of Order: 4 the Form of Prayers, Etc.," Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1993, accessed March 18, 2015, http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLs/GBO_ch04.htm.

difference lies in the expectations of the parents bringing the child for baptism, and Brownson touches on this as the "deeper problem" with infant dedication:

> The promise of God . . . is our last and strongest ground for hope and endurance in the spiritual nurture and care of our children. Infant dedication . . . can send the message that the salvation of our children depends finally on us, rather than on God.[417]

Brownson believes that parents need to trust in God's promises to their child rather than in their own attempts to ensure their child's salvation. Brownson's arguments notwithstanding, the question of whether parents and congregations understand the nuances of "dedicate" and other possible language options is beyond the scope of this study. The important point is that pastors and denominations are striving for congruence between their theological convictions and congregational practices.

Conclusion

The historical record provides descriptions of various practices associated with baptism and their related theologies over the course of church history. After situating contemporary baptismal practice in its historical context, the study now considers how practices shape people's lives and beliefs.

Practice and Identity Formation

In the latter half of the twentieth century, some scholars began merging theology with developing fields in the social sciences. The next section of this study takes this approach, addressing how practice plays a role in identity formation. This section examines practices in general, rather than focusing specifically on baptism. Different definitions of and models for practice are considered, and the potential challenges of incorporating practice into faith development are discussed.

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[417] Brownson, 207-208.

Theories of Practice

First, it is important to define what constitutes a practice. However, as religious studies scholar Nicholas Healy points out, even among the new scholars of practice, there is "no settled definition of what a practice is."[418] Therefore, any discussion must include not only a list of actions defined as practices, but also the reasoning behind their inclusion in such a list. In an article addressing this issue, Dykstra and Bass describe three recent approaches to defining practice.[419] The first approach encompasses any "socially meaningful action," such as serving meals at a soup kitchen. The second approach encompasses what is commonly referred to in Christian circles as "spiritual disciplines"—typically, a defined list of actions aimed at individual faith development.[420] The third approach is related to the first, but distinguishes certain practices as having an "internal good." The internal goods of a practice are those that can only be achieved by participation in this specific practice, whereas external goods can be achieved by a number of means.[421] Dykstra and Bass note that each of these approaches acknowledges that beliefs and practices should be understood in relation to one another.[422]

Historical theologian Margaret Miles explores practices using this second approach, focusing on "the most characteristic and continuously urged practices" in the

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[418] Nicholas M. Healy, "Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 3 (2003): 289.

[419] Dykstra and Bass, 20.

[420] Recent influential works include Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989); Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991); Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

[421] David Smith and James K. A. Smith, "Practices, Faith, and Pedagogy," in *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*, ed. David Smith and James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 8-9.

[422] Dykstra and Bass, 21.

history of Christianity: asceticism, worship, service, and prayer.[423] Miles reflects on the importance of these practices in faith development, but cautions against adopting them uncritically and without regard to their historical context. Instead, Miles encourages Christians to foster a self-awareness of their personal predispositions toward certain practices that practitioners in other times and places would be less disposed or able to perform.[424] She highlights this by laying out a set of diverse practices that variously, throughout history, have been judged to be the most important. Theologian Kathryn Tanner affirms Miles' approach, noting that traditions of practice and belief transform over time through cultural transmission.[425]

Habits and Ritual

This critical approach to practices is influenced by the work of social theorist Pierre Bourdieu.[426] The term *habitus* is central to Bourdieu's understanding of practice. Educator David I. Smith and philosopher James K. Smith define *habitus* as "an orientation to and understanding of the world that is absorbed and shaped at the level of practice."[427] Practice plays a formative role in creating an "embodied history, internalized as a second nature."[428] Through practices, *habitus* forms a way of life in the world.

Similarly, Anderson defines practice as "a pattern of action that we do repeatedly,

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[423] Margaret R. Miles, *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 92.

[424] Ibid., 9.

[425] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 128-129.

[426] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

[427] Smith and Smith, 10.

[428] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 56.

over time, with particular intent."[429] His definition is based on ritual studies scholar Catherine Bell's work on ritual as practice, which, in his opinion, avoids the limitations found in other theories of ritual performance that typically reduce practice to a single meaning.[430] According to Anderson, any one practice has multiple meanings that orient practitioners to the past, present, and future.[431] Participation in a practice over a period of time instills attitudes and desires within practitioners, which in turn inform their actions in the world.

Virtue and Internal Goods

The third approach, internal goods, derives from the work of moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. According to MacIntyre's oft-quoted definition of practice,

> Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[432]

MacIntyre is interested in how the internal goods of practices produce virtue. Scholars have contested his conclusions about the Enlightenment's detrimental effect on society. However, MacIntyre's influential definition remains the starting place in many fields that intersect with ethics and practice, including sociology and practical theology.[433]

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[429] Anderson, 29n41.

[430] Anderson, 83-89. Bell's definition of a ritual practice is human activity that is situational, strategic, embedded in misrecognition, and able to reproduce or reconfigure the ordering of power in the world. Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 81-82.

[431] Anderson, 98-99. The study will engage further with Anderson's work below.

[432] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 187.

[433] For a description of MacIntyre's work from the perspective of a Christian ethicist, see Brad J. Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's *After Virtue*," in *Virtues & Practices in the Christian*

Theorists generally restate MacIntyre's definition in order to contextualize it within their respective fields. In one example of this type of appropriation, Dykstra and Bass define Christian practices as "things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world."[434] The communal nature of practices plays an important role in this definition. Rather than focusing on clergy as the primary actors, Dykstra and Bass situate the locus of practice in the community itself and present a list of twelve practices that align with their definition.[435] Though not exhaustive, this list is meant as a foundation for understanding practices in a Christian framework. Moreover, as Miller points out, their definition is missional: these practices "enable Christians to participate in the redemptive mission of God."[436]

Comparing Bourdieu and MacIntyre

Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh Eric Schmidt, and Mark R. Valeri, the editors of *Practicing Protestants*, a study of the history of practices in American Protestantism, analyze the theories of Bourdieu and MacIntyre—as well as their progeny in the Christian Practices project.[437] According to Maffly-Kipp, Schmidt, and Valeri, both

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Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre, ed. Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 7-29.

[434] Dykstra and Bass, 18.

[435] This list includes, "honoring the body, hospitality, household economics, saying yes and saying no, keeping sabbath [sic], discernment, testimony, shaping communities, forgiveness, healing, dying well, and singing our lives to God." Ibid., 19. Elsewhere, Dykstra critiques the common view of practices today in churches as individualistic, as the focus is on clergy rather than communities. Craig R. Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice in Theological Inquiry and Education," in *Virtues & Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 165.

[436] Miller, 15.

[437] Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh Eric Schmidt, and Mark R. Valeri, eds., *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America, 1630-1965* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 1-6.

philosophers are interested in the importance of practices; however, there are some important differences in their methods. Bourdieu describes practices in the context of everyday life and social action, critiquing social structures and power relationships. MacIntyre is more concerned with formation of virtuous lives and embraces structures as empowering communities.[438] The editors critique this second approach, which is taken by Bass and Dykstra. In response to their criticism, Bass notes that each practice she and Dykstra support offers "critical and self-critical perspectives" and maintains that Christian practices are on the whole good.[439]

Practical theologian Ted Smith studies how ministers teach practice. Smith adheres more closely to Bourdieu's definition than to MacIntyre's.[440] Although he does not find these two approaches discordant, Smith points out that Bourdieu's *habitus* is smaller in scale than MacIntyre's internal goods. Therefore, he prefers to use *habitus* when helping students understand the shape of their own practice.

Moving Beyond Theory

After developing a theory of practice, the next step is creating a catalog of practices. This necessarily involves including some actions while excluding others. Healy divides these types of lists into two main categories: the first consists of practices that have a clear and specific structure; the second consists of practices that are more loosely

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[438] Ibid., 5.

[439] Dorothy C. Bass, "Ways of Life Abundant," in *For Life Abundant : Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 29n10.

[440] David D. Daniels, III and Ted A. Smith, "History, Practice, and Theological Education," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 217n2.

structured.[441] In contrast, Mikoski classifies practices by degree of importance in relation to other practices. He categorizes baptism and other liturgical practices as "primary constituting practices," from which other practices, such as hospitality, find their "depth, direction, and meaning."[442] Because of this conviction, Mikoski devotes an entire volume to baptismal practice. However, Dykstra and Bass—as well as other writers related to their project—interact with baptism only as it relates to practices that fit their definition.[443] This is because baptism does not meet one specific need, but rather redefines the shape of human needs.[444]

James K. Smith differentiates types of practices as "thick" versus "thin" habits.[445] A thin habit is an everyday, mundane task that integrates into some other greater goal; it does not typically lead to identity formation. A thick habit is a "meaning-full" practice that is essential to identity formation and shapes our desires. This is illustrated by the difference between brushing teeth—an important practice toward good health but not identity forming—and attending Sunday worship—a practice that directs our desires and, in turn, informs our approach to the world.[446] These thick habits are the practices that

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[441] Healy, 290.

[442] Mikoski, 4-5.

[443] Dykstra and Bass have edited and contributed to many volumes on Christian practices, including Dorothy C. Bass, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Pub, 1997); Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra, eds., *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

[444] ". . . baptism does not address a specific need; instead, it ritually sketches the contours of a whole new life, within which all human needs can be perceived in a different way." Dykstra and Bass, 31.

[445] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 82-83.

[446] Smith notes "not all thick habits are specifically religious." Ibid., 83.

interact with and shape cognitive beliefs, and it is this interaction between belief and practice to which we turn.

Practice and Belief

The relationship between practice and belief occupies contested terrain. In particular, scholars disagree on two main things: whether practice precedes or follows from belief; and whether right practice is the cause or the result of right belief.

Theologian Miroslav Volf and James K. Smith hold opposing viewpoints in the debate over the ordinal relationship between practice and belief. Volf contends that beliefs ground practices, and that beliefs about God create a way of life reflective of these beliefs.[447] Conversely, Smith claims that beliefs—and, in turn, worldviews—emerge from practices.[448] Volf and Smith apply their respective theories to their study of the relationship between worship and the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the early Christian church. Volf argues that a new understanding of the nature of the Trinity shaped the early church's worship, while Smith contends that this doctrine was formulated in response to these worship practices.[449]

The second debate about the cause-and-effect relationship between practice and belief stems from a question about the interdependency of practice and belief, rather than from prioritizing one over the other. If practices can effect a desired result, then practicing correctly will effect the right belief and actions. Anderson describes practice and belief as "mutually causative"; in other words, practices both shape and are shaped

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[447] Miroslav Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 260-262.

[448] Smith, 138-139.

[449] Volf, 259-260; Smith, 135.

by the beliefs of the community.[450] Dykstra, on the other hand, holds that practices have no causality. Rather, Christian practices are "habitations of the Spirit" whereby participants are put in a position to experience God's changing power.[451]

Theologian Amy Plantinga Pauw claims that right practice is not the remedy for bad belief. Instead, practice and belief arise from human desire and attitude.[452] She points out a paradox for Christians: they desire to want to do the right thing, yet they accept that they fail to act on that desire.[453] Ultimately, good practices will shape good desires only by God's grace and not by the right human action, per se.[454]

Measuring the degree of effectiveness for a given practice is another aspect of this debate. In his definition of practices, Dykstra points out that practices currently are conceived as something someone does for someone else; in the context of the Church, this "someone" usually is a clergyperson.[455] Dykstra labels this approach individualistic because the point of focus is the individual. He believes this is problematic since the criterion of a good practice becomes its effectiveness. This effectiveness is reliant on the

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[450] Anderson, 29. Anderson critiques the liturgical renewal movement for guiding denominations in changing the content of liturgical texts without changing the corresponding habits of individual congregations. This implies that there is a needed parallelism to shape both beliefs and practices if wider change is to be effective. Ibid., 78.

[451] "[Christian practices] are not, finally, activities we do to make something spiritual happen in our lives. Nor are they duties we undertake to be obedient to God. Rather, they are patterns of communal action that create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy, and presence of God may be made known to us. They are places where the power of God is experienced. In the end, they are not ultimately our practices but forms of participation in the practice of God." Craig R. Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 66.

[452] "Both our cognitive and practical efforts arise out of our loves." Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Attending to the Gaps between Beliefs and Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 45.

[453] Ibid., 47.

[454] Ibid., 48.

[455] Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice in Theological Inquiry and Education," 164-165.

practitioner being properly guided by theory—the practitioner is expected to be able to give an explanation of his or her actions—and on its generating the desired effects.[456] In addition, this approach is problematic because it is typically ahistorical and abstract: historical practices are valuable only as far as theories and principles may be abstracted from them, necessitating separating these practices from their historical contexts.[457] Dykstra insists that practices are strengthened by maintaining the contextualized relationship between the current practitioners and those who have come before. This is highlighted by the relationship between practice and narrative and the role that narrative plays in identity formation.

Practice and Narrative

Paul Miller notes that while there is "nothing inherently Christian in the notion of a practice," the Christian narrative instills a theological identity into a practice.[458] In turn, as they are experienced in the midst of community, these narrative-filled practices shape individual identity. Practices are the vehicle by which narratives are created and understood. They reorient a person's understanding of self and relationship with others. Practices are oriented simultaneously to the past, present, and future, and this temporal orientation defines the narrative arcs of the practice and the practitioner.

Narratives Give Meaning to Practices

Volf argues that narratives provide the contours for participation in practices.[459] Without Christianity's founding stories, Christian practices lose their meaning. Similarly,

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[456] Ibid., 165-166.

[457] Ibid., 167-168.

[458] Miller, 15.

[459] Volf, 251.

Hauerwas claims that narratives are central to the formation of Christian identity and community: the very story of Christianity is the story of God's work on behalf of his people enacted in the context of history.[460] Worship scholar Sally A. Brown also embraces this narrative approach; she shows how Christian communities uphold certain texts as authoritative for understanding their beliefs, and how, in turn, those beliefs are conveyed largely by means of narratives.[461] Christian philosopher Nancey Murphy concurs with Hauerwas' arguments, arguing that Christian tradition is founded upon authoritative texts.[462] Hauerwas and Murphy both are influenced by the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. However, as Brown points out, Hauerwas and Murphy give precedence to narrative, while MacIntyre believes narrative is co-constitutive with tradition, practice, and virtue, where all elements work together to give meaning and shape identity.[463] Brown claims that privileging the role of narrative in defining Christian action oversimplifies the nature of action. She also notes that recent scholars take a more nuanced view of the power of narrative in practice.[464]

When compared with other methods of theological interpretation, the use of narratives is "compelling, inviting, and motivating in ways that doctrines rarely are,"

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[460] "The nature of Christian ethics is determined by the fact that Christian convictions take the form of a story, or perhaps better, a set of stores that constitutes a tradition, which in turn creates and forms a community." Hauerwas, 24.

[461] Sally A. Brown, "Exploring the Text-Practice Interface: Acquiring the Virtue of Hermeneutical Modesty," *Theology Today* 66, no. 3 (2009): 280, 283-284.

[462] Nancey C. Murphy, "Using MacIntyre's Method in Christian Ethics," in *Virtues & Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, ed. Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 32.

[463] Brown, 285.

[464] Ibid., 293-294.

according to theologian Kathleen Cahalan.[465] But she also points out that narratives can misrepresent the past when practices are not contextualized properly in the present. This results in golden-age thinking: believing that a practice will produce the same results today as it did in the past. Effectively connecting a historic practice with the present experience of a community is the ministry leader's primary role.[466] MacIntyre concurs, claiming that "practices have histories" that are passed down through communities as traditions.[467] These traditions carry past beliefs through the present and into the future, all the while being shaped by other social traditions. As Tanner points out, Christian practices are constantly engaging with and reshaping themselves in response to outside, non-Christian practices.[468] To understand Christian practices rightly is to encounter them in relation to the practices of the surrounding culture in which they have been or are being practiced.[469]

According to MacIntyre, narrative does, to some degree, undergird all action within the world: "I can only answer the question 'What can I do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"[470] An individual's self-

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[465] Kathleen A. Cahalan, "Introducing Ministry and Fostering Integration: Teaching the Bookends of the Masters of Divinity Program," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 108.

[466] Ibid., 108-109.

[467] MacIntyre, 107

[468] "Christian practices seem to be constituted in great part by a slippery give-and-take with non-Christian practices; indeed, they are mostly non-Christian practices—eating, meeting, greeting—done differently, born again, to unpredictable effect." Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflection and Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 230.

[469] Ibid., 231.

[470] MacIntyre, 216.

identity is based upon her personal story seen through the stories that surround her.[471] Philosophical scholar Stephen Crites explains that there are two types of stories: sacred stories, or the underlying narratives whereby people understand their sense of self and the surrounding world; and mundane stories, or the everyday stories that are told in any form.[472] These types of stories are interrelated, and both shape experience. Present experience itself is narrative because it is an "incipient," or developing, story.[473] Key to this viewpoint is the tension of past (memory), present, and future (anticipation), and Crites concludes that narrative is the fundamental concept that holds this tension together.[474]

Narratives Get Embedded by Practices

While narratives ground meaning for practices, in turn, practices influence the acquisition of narratives. As Miller puts it, practices "give expression" to narratives.[475] Theologian Eugene Peterson notes that the sustaining practices of the Church are meant to direct believers into the story of the Resurrection.[476]

In *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues refer to "practices of commitment," contrasting them with "practices of separation" that promote

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[471] Ibid., 221.

[472] Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," in *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 70.

[473] Ibid., 72.

[474] Ibid., 78.

[475] Miller, 20.

[476] Eugene H. Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing up in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 12-13.

an "expressive individualism."[477] These practices of commitment help outsiders entering a community to understand its beliefs.[478] Similarly, educational theorist Etienne Wenger defines practice as "a shared history of learning that requires some catching up for joining,"[479] and Anderson describes how the practice of corporate worship helps communities "learn to see the world through the story of Jesus."[480]

Practices not only allow people to view the world through the lens of Christ's story, they also help them write themselves into his story. According to Smith, this practice-enabled progression from being observers of to participants in the story is a crucial step in identity formation. Instead of only telling the gospel story in the reading and preaching of scripture, he characterizes the postmodern church as also narrating the story through its practices.[481]

Narratives Shape Identity Through Practices

Old Testament scholar Rolf Jacobson maintains that because "human identity is inherently narrative," humans cannot understand experience outside the context of

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[477] "People growing up in communities of memory not only hear the stories that tell how the community came to be, what its hopes and fears are, and how its ideals are exemplified in outstanding men and women; they also participate in the practices—ritual, aesthetic, ethical—that define the community as a way of life . . . they define the patterns of loyalty and obligation that keep the community alive." Robert N. Bellah et al., eds., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 154.

[478] Ibid., 157.

[479] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 102.

[480] E. Byron Anderson, "Worship: Schooling in the Tradition of Jesus," *Theology Today* 66, no. 1 (2009): 21. Worship functions like a school in three ways, according to Anderson: 1. "We conceive of [a school] as a particular place, even a building or group of buildings, to which we go for instruction." 2. "A school is also a people, gathered for some common purpose or associated with some particular set of practices." 3. "A school is also a people gathered together in a relationship of teacher and student, master and disciple." Ibid., 27-28.

[481] James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 75-77.

story.[482] But Jacobson also contends that our stories are inadequate because they do not tell the whole truth. From a Christian perspective, sin makes people incapable "either of knowing the whole truth or of telling the truth when [they] do know it."[483] This is remedied by a story coming from outside one's personal story that tells the truth about human identity. Ultimately, these outside stories help make sense of new experiences, transforming self-definition into a particular identity.[484]

This transformation of self-identity is not merely understood cognitively through story; self-identity also is shaped by practice that embeds that story. According to Smith, "A vision of the good life captures our hearts and imaginations not by providing a set of rules or ideas, but by painting a picture of what it looks like for us to flourish and live well."[485] The vision of the good life is informed by the stories being told in the world. These stories, in turn, embed habits in the heart by means of practices "that train the heart . . . to desire certain ends."[486] These desires form the precognitive material that shapes identity and motivates individual action in the world.

The tendency today, according to Miles, is to strive for right thinking in order to effect right behavior. Historically, however, the goal of practice was "a combination of understanding and strong experience that created a religious self."[487] Instead of the

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[482] Rolf A. Jacobson, "We Are Our Stories: Narrative Dimension of Human Identity and Its Implications for Christian Faith Formation," *Word & World* 34, no. 2 (2014): 130. Jacobson substantiates his thesis with quotations from a diverse field of modern scholars. Ibid., 124-125.

[483] Ibid., 125.

[484] Ibid., 128-129.

[485] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 53.

[486] Ibid., 58.

[487] Miles, 90.

modern tendency toward individualism, historically the experience of practices was understood to be amplified within the context of community.

Anderson situates practice and ritual in a past/present/future dichotomy that he refers to as manifestation (past), presentation (present), and emergence (future).[488] These categories are fluid and interrelated, but they can be misshapen when one is emphasized over and against the others. Many communities focus solely on Manifestation; their practice re-enacts past events that have been significant in forming the community. However, Anderson argues that situating practice in Presentation and Emergence is just as crucial. When reflecting on the aspects of Presentation, communities can see how their practice is both being shaped by and shaping their community.[489] And recognizing the Emergent nature of practice enables communities to acknowledge that a practice shapes identity in ways that are yet unrevealed, "[focusing] on the life that is yet to be."[490]

Conclusion

The field of practice theory intersects various academic disciplines. It has been adopted by Christian theorists in order to describe Christian practices in light of modern social theories. Several approaches to defining practices, along with the intersection of practice and belief and the interdependency of practice and narrative in the process of identity formation, were assessed in this section. It now concludes with a summary of the significant findings from the literature review.

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[488] Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity*, 99-110.

[489] Anderson notes that MacIntyre's definition—with its emphasis on the internal goods of practices—is built upon the standpoint of Presentation. Ibid., 102-103.

[490] Ibid., 108.

Summary of Literature Review

The preceding literature review demonstrates that there is a need for congruence between the practice and theology of baptism in order to instill identity in individuals and congregations. The biblical data portrays the multivalent nature of baptism as it has been applied to understanding the systems of salvation, Christian living, and initiation into the covenant community. Evidence from the historical record shows that the practice of baptism both shaped the understanding of baptism and was shaped by the rising theological understandings of baptism. In turn, baptismal practices have not always been consistent with the professed theological perspective of baptism. Finally, the interrelationship of narrative with practice plays a significant role in identity formation as the basis and the means of shaping individuals. With these matters in mind, the study now turns to an overview of the methodology employed for conducting research interviews, followed by a report of the findings from those interviews.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This study has been designed to explore how pastoral conduct of corporate worship services helps congregants connect the practice of baptism to the pursuit of spiritual formation. Four research questions frame the study:

1. How do pastors describe the role baptism plays in the process of spiritual formation?
2. How do pastors understand the interaction between the theology and the practices of baptism in the lives of their congregants?
3. What steps do pastors take to foster baptismal formation in their congregants
    a. while preparing for baptism?
    b. in the years following baptism?
4. What outcomes do pastors desire to observe in congregants engaged in baptismal formation?

This chapter will describe the approaches employed to prepare, conduct, and analyze research interviews with study participants.

Design of the Study

The assumption underlying this dissertation is that learning takes place in the context of ministry. Therefore, a qualitative study was designed to understand the points of view of pastors from their experiences. Educational researcher Sharan Merriam defines four characteristics of qualitative research: "the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the

process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive."[491] While quantitative research focuses on testing hypotheses, qualitative methods allow the researcher to generate a hypothesis and find meaning by looking at the data rather than confirming or denying a previously held belief.[492] In addition, there is room for participants to express themselves more fully in regards to their situation instead of being constrained to the categories that the researcher is testing.

Participant Sample Selection

For this study, the researcher interviewed six pastors affiliated with five denominations. This diversity illuminated the various ways both denominations and individuals integrate baptismal practices into spiritual formation. A second variable was the length of each pastor's ministry experience. This allowed the study to identify generational understandings of baptism and spiritual formation, as well as track wisdom gained over the duration of ministry.

In order to determine how similar perspectives developed into distinct practices, a theological common ground was a primary criterion for participant selection. Given that this study looks at baptism from a Reformed perspective, the majority of the interviewees are from Presbyterian and Reformed denominations. Two pastors are from the same denomination; the other two pastors are from different denominations that share similar theological standards and historical practices. Two additional pastors were selected from divergent traditions that have developed baptismal practices in separate ways. However, although they are not Presbyterian or Reformed, these pastors do hold theological beliefs

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[491] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 14.

[492] Ibid., 18.

rooted in the Protestant Reformation. This illuminated the ways in which church practices can overlap despite different historical developments and theological understandings of baptism. This, in turn, helped further one of the study's goals: to promote interdenominational unity in baptismal understanding and practice.

There were several conditions the interviewees needed to meet in order to participate in the study. Each participant had to be ordained to a pastoral office in his congregation in the past year at the time of the interview. Participants were required to have held ordination for at least five years; this ensured that their sensibilities regarding baptism and spiritual formation were developed in and shaped by the local church, rather than based solely upon their pre-ordination education or experience. Additionally, each participant needed to have played a key role in the planning and conducting of baptisms for their congregation. However, because congregations and denominations have different ordination requirements for pastors, and in order to avoid any bias toward higher levels of theological education, this study did not include a graduate degree in ministry among its criteria for participation.

One intentional variable was length of ministry experience. Some pastors were serving in their first pastoral call, while others had served multiple congregations during their careers. In addition, pastors from diverse geographical areas were selected, in order to correlate differing emphases in practice with regional cultural factors.

The researcher initially contacted prospective interviewees via email, sending an introductory letter explaining the purpose of the study and requesting their participation. A Research Participant Consent Form was distributed to and returned by each participant, in order to respect and protect their rights. An additional demographic form was

submitted by the participant prior to the interview in order to confirm that relevant data requirements detailed above had been met, as well as to collect basic congregational statistics, including the size of the church and the approximate number of baptisms performed in the past year. These statistics had no bearing on participant selection; however, they provided relevant data during the interview and analysis stages.

Data Collection

Research data was collected using interviews conducted with the participants. This data included both interview transcriptions and field notes compiled during the interviews.

Interviews

A semi-structured interview protocol was used in this study. Initially, the interview was guided by a predetermined set of questions, but this protocol allowed the researcher to engage the participant with probing questions to follow any new directions the interview took.[493] The questions tended to be more general, in the expectation that as participants opened up about broader subjects, they would provide critical data in ways perhaps unexpected by the researcher.

Each interview was scheduled to last between sixty and ninety minutes, allowing time for an informal period of warm-up conversation and for testing internet connections and recording equipment.

The following questions structured the interview. (Specific probing questions are not provided, as these varied depending on the direction each interview took.)

1. How is baptism practiced in your congregation?

[493] Ibid., 89-90.

2. Has the practice changed any over time? Why?
3. As a pastor, what comes to your mind when you hear the phrase “baptismal formation”? What do you think might be involved in pursuing baptismal formation?
4. Think of a time when you performed a baptism that called believers to grow in their baptism. What types of responses were you hoping to encourage?
5. As a pastor, what understanding of baptism do you want your baptismal services to communicate to your congregation?
6. Tell me your thoughts on corporate worship as a medium for conveying baptismal formation within your congregation.
7. What are your practices (other elements than the sacrament) that promote baptismal formation in your worship?
8. If you were going to offer your advice to young pastors who desire to improve their practices of baptismal formation, what would you say?
9. I’m getting help from experienced pastors like you to answer the question, “How might worship practices cultivate baptismal formation?” Is there anything we missed that you’d like to say?

Following each interview, the researcher evaluated the questions for their relevance to the research project and their coherence to the research participant. Overlap and redundancy were reduced so that in the next interview, more time would be spent on applicable concepts and stories. The order of the questions was altered as necessary to facilitate genuine responses from the participant without leading from the researcher.

The interviews were conducted over the internet using Skype and recorded with the

Call Recorder plugin, which records both audio and video to further aid coding for any potential non-verbal cues. A backup recording was made using a smartphone voice recorder application, to guard against the unexpected event of a plugin failure or data lost on the hard drive. The audio transcription was completed by an online service, and coding took place as each transcript was made available to download.

Observations

As each interview was conducted, the researcher observed those moments and statements where the participants offered personal reflection and insight that revealed their hearts as pastors toward their congregants. Observations were recorded by hand in a field notebook. These notes provided an account of significant statements for each interview question, enabling the researcher to return to key ideas later in the interview. They also documented which concepts stimulated the interview as it progressed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using the constant-comparative method. In other words, analysis took place throughout the entire research process, allowing an iterative approach to data collection. Each segment of data was compared with others in order to identify patterns, which in turn were grouped together to form categories that are reported here in the findings.[494]

Pilot Study

Prior to the interviews, a pilot interview was conducted in order to asses the questions and, if necessary, reconfigure the interview protocol. The participant gave feedback on an early version of the interview guide, and coached the researcher in the

[494] Ibid., 30.

semi-structured interview protocol. The researcher practiced conducting the interview in a conversational manner, and learned how to ask probing questions that facilitated worthwhile data.

Researcher Position

The researcher's stance in relation to this study is that of an insider-outsider. As an ordained pastor in the PCA, the researcher shares some of the participants' views on baptism and the sacraments, and disagrees with others. Having been baptized himself as child and having baptized his own children, the researcher has experienced baptism differently than those who were baptized after a personal profession of faith. The goal of this study, however, is to speak in ways that are applicable to all Christians, although there may be points of disagreement among readers. The dissertation addresses dissenting opinions in the hopes of finding a common ground amidst the various theologies and practices found within orthodox Christianity.

Study Limitations

Due to limited time and resources, only six pastors were interviewed for this study. Participants were limited to those planning and conducting baptisms on a regular basis.

This study does not provide an exhaustive review of the literature. The researcher will go into as much depth as possible considering the time available.

Finally, the conclusions of this study are drawn only from the experiences of those who were interviewed, along with input obtained from selected readings. Although the interview analysis and its resultant conclusions are not universally applicable to all times and situations, some of the study's conclusions about the relationship between baptismal practices and spiritual formation may be generalized to baptismal formation in other parts

of the world. As with all qualitative studies, readers are responsible to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context.

Chapter 4

Data Report and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors' conduct of corporate worship services helps congregants connect the practice of baptism to the pursuit of spiritual formation. Four research questions guided the study:

1. How do pastors describe the role of baptism in the process of spiritual formation?
2. How do pastors understand the interaction between the theology of baptism and the practices of baptism for their congregants?
3. What steps do pastors take to enable baptismal formation in their congregants
    a. while preparing for baptism?
    b. in the years following baptism?
4. What outcomes do pastors hope to observe in congregants engaged in baptismal formation?

This chapter introduces the study participants and presents their insights about the study questions.

Introduction to Participants and Context

Six pastors were selected to participate in this study. All names and identifiable information of participants have been changed to protect their anonymity. Mark Andrews has been the senior pastor of a Presbyterian congregation on the West Coast for the past six years. Weekly church attendance averages 200 people. This is his first pastorate. Scott Butler is the senior pastor of a Presbyterian church in the South with an active membership of around 400 people. More than half of his forty years in ministry have

been with this particular congregation. Phil Davis has been the campus pastor of a multi-site Reformed congregation in the West for close to six years. Average attendance at his campus is 200 people. Charles Lance currently is an assistant pastor of a large Presbyterian church in the Southeast, where he has served almost four years. He was first ordained in his denomination almost thirty years ago, and he has also served as a church planter and an organizing pastor for other congregations in the region. Jeff Edwards has been the worship pastor at a Baptist congregation in the Midwest for the past eight years. He oversees five worship services meeting across two campuses; his church has a total attendance of around 2,000 people. Brett Cook has been an ordained Anglican priest for five years, serving a Southern congregation of 120 people that he helped plant from a larger congregation.

Baptism and Spiritual Formation

The first interview question asked the pastors to describe the role baptism plays in spiritual formation. Each pastor initially was caught off guard by the term "baptismal formation." Charles even joked that it sounded like the next bestseller book concept—it would sell a lot of copies and then be gone in five years. But as each pastor began to reflect on the possible connections between spiritual formation and baptism, a common theme of identity emerged: baptism enables the recipient to identify with God's story, provides a new identity for the individual, provides a new identity within a community, and precipitates ongoing identity formation in believers.

Identify with God's Story

The first thematic element that the interviewees brought up was that baptism places recipients within the narrative of God's story. When describing the steps leading

up to the ceremony, each pastor advocated connecting God's story with the testimony of either the new believer or the new parents, in order to contextualize God's work in their lives as it pertains to baptism. When Charles meets with people in preparation for baptism, he says, "Tell me your story of Jesus." It is important for him to hear their story so he can frame elements of the baptism ceremony in light of how God has worked in the life of this individual or family.

The narrative of God's initial and ongoing work is also an important frame of reference for pastoring individuals who have already been baptized and are returning to the faith later in life. This story helps them see that, as Phil put it, "God was present the first time [they] were baptized. Seeds were planted that the Spirit has been watering that are now coming above the soil." God's action toward individuals and families is the basis for the pursuit of spiritual formation and the motivation for participating in the means of grace.

New Individual Identity

A second element weaving through the interviews was that baptism establishes a new identity for recipients, setting them out on a new journey. When meeting with parents, Scott makes a point of explaining that infant baptism is not a rite of passage. Rather, it marks a new relationship with God and his people. Mark frequently reminds baptized children that they are "claimed by God." He takes a similar approach to pastoral counseling, where he intentionally points people back to their baptism to remind them of their identity in Christ. According to Brett, "baptism is a stepping into the journey" of spiritual formation, which "facilitates us knowing God, loving Him more, being loved by Him, and entering ever more deeply into the mystery of His goodness." Phil pointed out

that treating all methods of spiritual formation as equally formative for all people does not dignify them as individuals. Instead, pastors should remember that the process of spiritual formation looks different for each one of their congregants.

New Community Identity

A third element the pastors brought up when discussing baptismal formation was the importance of community identity, and the relationship between the newly baptized and his or her congregation. One of the principles of Southern Baptist churches is congregational autonomy, and Jeff talked about how each church establishes its community identity through worship practices, specifically baptism. Brett referred to baptism as "the sacrament of welcome," which emphasizes the posture he wants his congregation to take toward recipients. All of the pastors spoke of baptism in the context of the process of church membership: for new believers being baptized, they are joining the church for the first time; for the parents of children being baptized, they are professing believers and active members in the church. Phil and Mark both noted that because church membership is countercultural in their locale (the West), embracing this community identity serves as an even stronger affirmation of the new individual identity coming with baptism.

Identifying publicly with Christ and the people of God through membership is part of spiritual formation and maturing in faith. Scott gave the example of a woman who delayed her baptism for a few years because she was afraid of doing it publicly. Overcoming this fear and receiving baptism was a sign of her spiritual growth. In addition, the community plays an important role in nurturing baptismal formation by catalyzing spiritual growth as people learn to live in community together. This communal

aspect also is demonstrated when congregations vow to aid parents in raising their children in the Lord. Mark vividly illustrates this by walking the newly baptized child around the church and inviting the congregation to imagine the roles they will play in the child's life.

Ongoing Identity Formation

The fourth element in the theme of identity brought up in the interviews was that baptism begins the process of ongoing identity formation. Each of the pastors either quoted directly from or referenced 2 Corinthians 5:17: being made a "new creation" results in a new way of living that is characterized by dying to sin and rising to new life. The interviewees used other similar imagery as well, including turning from darkness to light and putting off the old self and putting on the new self. These Biblical images illustrate the rhythm of the Christian life—"[immerse] us in it," as Brett put it— and continually returning to baptism gives Christians assurance in the lifelong battle against sin.

All the pastors associated baptism with sanctification, or the ongoing pursuit of holiness in the Christian life. Phil described sanctification as "being formed into the image of Christ, living into your baptism. What baptism says in the moment is an invitation for us to live out for the rest of our lives." According to Jeff, baptism points to the "completeness and incompleteness" of the Christian life; it is an exercise of saving faith performed while one still is in the process of growing into salvation. Mark described how baptism makes people into "instruments of righteousness" and that their interactions with the world is part of their formation as a new creation.

Summary of Baptism and Spiritual Formation

The interviews all showed that the nature of spiritual formation is linked to baptism in many ways. Baptism ties the individual into God's story, forming the root of spiritual formation. Baptism results in a new identity for the recipient, as he or she is invited on the journey of spiritual formation. Baptism relates individuals to their new community, a space offering opportunities for spiritual formation. Finally, continually returning to baptism—or living into baptism—through the process of sanctification results in spiritual formation as the believer's being and actions grow into the image of Christ.

Theology and Practice of Baptism

The second research question examined the interaction between the theology and practices of baptism. The interviewees described two approaches—pedagogic and experiential—they take to help their congregants understand baptism.

Pedagogic Approach

The pedagogic approach involves explaining the meaning of baptism generally, and, for Mark, Brett, Scott, Charles, and Phil, defending infant baptism specifically. Each pastor noted a variety of meanings of baptism that they want their congregation to understand, including that baptism is a sign and seal, is a means of grace, and is covenantal. All six speak directly to the individuals and families coming forward for baptism, and to the congregation listening in on the conversation.

The pastors pointed out that these explanations benefit the congregation in two ways. First, taking the time to explain baptism offers an evangelistic opportunity for non-believers to hear the gospel. Charles described his approach as having "a casual

conversation about a deep, deep truth," where he makes the meaning straightforward enough to be understood by all who are gathered. And as Phil noted, the pastoral explanation functions as evangelism training for believers who are hearing an example of how to explain the gospel to others. Second, the explanations give the congregation an entry point into the ceremony, allowing them to be participants rather than mere audience members. This flows into the ceremony when the congregation vows to participate in the life of the new member.

The four Presbyterian and Reformed pastors give an explicitly covenantal defense of infant baptism in their services, and Brett also alludes to covenant theology when he teaches his congregation about baptism. All five of them noted the influence of Baptist theology in their individual contexts, although this was a more pressing concern for the pastors ministering in the South. According to Phil, explaining infant baptism reveals God's gracious activity toward all recipients of baptism. Each pastor bases his defense of infant baptism on the Old Testament covenant, which covered not only the faithful but also their families, and was signified by circumcision. Today, baptism is the sign that signifies inclusion in the covenant community. Mark described his approach as showing what infant baptism means rather than concentrating on what it doesn't mean. He said that when pastors focus on what baptism doesn't mean, it ends up losing meaning altogether, which is a possible danger in over utilizing the pedagogic approach.

Experiential Approach

The second, "experiential," approach to baptism each pastor described in his interview encompasses what Jeff called "embodied practices." The experiential power of baptism comes from the content of the liturgy itself, and from its placement in the

services—something the pastors are intentional about. Each pastor allows for the practice to express meaning on its own rather than explaining every last detail. Brett, in particular, believes that "the liturgy speaks for itself." Similarly, Mark claimed that infant baptism is "its own defense and apologetic," despite mentioning earlier that he spends a good bit of time defending infant baptism.

Each pastor includes prayers in the ceremony that are infused with the meaning they intend their congregation to receive. Both Phil and Mark incorporate the French Reformed Prayer (referenced in Chapter Two), which for them embodies the meaning of infant baptism.[495] Scott claims a Bible verse for the child, based on his or her name, and ties it to the promises of baptism. Four of the pastors—Brett, Jeff, Mark, and Phil—include the renunciation of sin in their baptismal vows, a theological analogy to turning from darkness to light. Each pastor related stories of people who changed their minds about the meaning of baptism because they saw it practiced over time. Some came to accept infant baptism as biblically valid; others (in Jeff's congregation) decided they needed to receive baptism after becoming a believer even though they had been baptized as infants.

Jeff has developed three liturgies, conducted as responsive readings, which explain the meaning of baptism in different ways. Therefore, when they recite the liturgies, his congregation participates in the exposition of the meaning of baptism. Each liturgy follows a different format: catechism questions and answers affirming the meaning of baptism; prayer on the purpose of the sacrament as a sign and a seal; reading various New Testament passages about baptism. Jeff intentionally cycles through these

[495] See Appendix B.

liturgies so his congregation will return to and reflect on the meanings on a regular basis.

Echoing Jeff's principle of regularly returning to baptism, each pastor talked about how often they schedule baptisms in their congregations, and where they place baptisms in the service. Brett and Phil follow the liturgical year, and hold baptisms at significant moments in the liturgical calendar. This allows them to incorporate each baptism into the broader themes of particular Feast Days and bring the experience of the recipient into the larger picture of God's story. Mark makes a point of scheduling only one baptism at a time—rather than holding multiple baptisms in the same service—both to have his congregation encounter baptisms more often and to focus on the significance of each individual receiving baptism. Jeff schedules baptisms about three times a year, and he makes sure that at least one person will be baptized at each of the services because he doesn't want anyone "to miss out on that part of our celebration as a body."

Just as they make a deliberate choice about how frequently to hold baptisms, the pastors also are intentional about where to place the ceremony in the worship service. Phil holds baptisms after the sermon and right before communion in order to set up a "beautiful moment of both sacraments coming in stereo." He believes that this moment illustrates what it looks like to live out the gospel after it has been preached. Charles prefers to baptize before the sermon, because the message will have "some bearing upon the event we just participated in together as a community." Scott takes a pragmatic view of placement; in his experience, it is less stressful for the parents when he baptizes their children earlier in the service.

Summary of Theology and Practice of Baptism

The interviews highlighted the pedagogic and experiential approaches the pastors

take in order to bring together the theology and practice of baptism. Pedagogic techniques included explaining the meaning of baptism, either before or after the ceremony, for the benefit of both the participants and the congregation. Experiential techniques express the meaning of baptism amidst the ceremony itself. These elements included the content of prayers, the frequency of baptisms during the year, and the placement of baptism in the service.

Steps Toward Baptismal Formation

The third research question sought to understand how pastors enable baptismal formation, during the time spent preparing for baptism and in the years following baptism. While each pastor has prepared pre-baptism plans that applied to all recipients, their post-baptism strategies are more varied and organic. Complicating the attempt to differentiate between pre- and post-baptism strategies is the fact that corporate worship was discussed as a medium that could enable both pre- and post-baptismal formation, depending on whether or not the congregant had received baptism yet. More often than not, corporate worship was discussed in the context of remembering baptism, so although it includes allusions to pre-baptismal formation, this analysis is placed in the section on post-baptismal formation.

Formation Before Baptism

All discussions of preparation for baptism were in the context of church membership: the new convert receiving baptism in conjunction with joining the church, or the child being brought for baptism by his or her communicant parents. The pastors described similar processes for teaching about the meaning of baptism during membership classes and for meeting with the individual or parents to hear their testimony

related to baptism.

Each pastor, or one of his elders, meets directly with new converts in preparation for their baptism. He considers their testimony and the seriousness of their faith, and instructs them in the basics of Christian faith and on how baptism relates to the Christian life. These meetings typically are held in conjunction with a membership class, which conveys the link between baptism and membership with the church. In Jeff's congregation, all the individuals who are going to be baptized write down their faith stories, which are published in a book. This gives Jeff the opportunity to examine deeply what each person understands about baptism and assess whether this is a genuine profession of faith. Sometimes, he realizes that a person is not yet ready for baptism, and he counsels them to step back and take account of their faith. According to Jeff, these people either come back later with a stronger faith and receive baptism, or they walk away from the faith altogether.

The paedobaptist pastors all talked about the importance of interviewing parents beforehand about their faith. They instruct them on the meaning of baptism and encourage them as they grow as parents. This interview is an opportunity to help the parents make the connection between their personal faith and what their child is being brought into through baptism. Scott teaches parents that in light of the covenant, parenting means living out their faith in front of their children. His goal is to show them how parenthood originated with God the Father, and to set them on the path of doing the work of post-baptismal formation with their children. In addition to personally meeting with the parents, Brett provides a devotional booklet he wrote containing readings for the seven days leading up to their child's baptism. This helps them prepare to enter into the

liturgy.

Most did not mention ways that they explicitly prepare their congregations for upcoming baptisms. Charles, however, wants the entire congregation to anticipate the celebration of baptism, so he teaches about the sacrament in the preceding weeks, announcing it to the congregation in hopes that people will stop and think, "What are we doing this for?" He wants to engage the non-believer in prolonged reflection on the implications of the sacrament. Jeff also noted that he engages non-believers by providing the booklet of faith stories. People can see themselves in the stories of those being baptized; they are testimonies that can resonate with people at every stage in their faith.

Formation After Baptism

Post-baptismal formation occurs both in the context of corporate worship and through ongoing discipleship. The concept of remembering baptism came up in each interview, particularly with regards to how recipients reencounter baptism in the context of worship. The pastors also described how ongoing discipleship contributes to faith formation, although this happens in different ways for adults and children. The following section analyzes how remembering baptism aids formation, and looks at how the meanings of baptism connect explicitly and implicitly to the other elements of corporate worship.

Remembering

Each pastor takes his own approach to remembering. All of them point out to their members that the moment of baptism is not just for the recipient; it is also meant to remind the people gathered of their own baptisms. But Jeff views membership as the primary site of both corrective and formative discipline, the latter being how he describes

spiritual formation. To this end, his congregation annually renews their membership covenant, marking the connection between membership and baptism. This practice of membership is an ongoing means of baptismal formation, prompting members to reflect on God's work in their lives and their faithfulness to the covenant in the past year. Brett invites his members to renew the promises of God's covenant during baptism services. They not only recall their own baptism but they are reminded that Jesus "has rescued [them] . . . invited [them] into the life of God . . . filled [them] with the Holy Spirit." Remembering is part of entering more fully into God's story.

Scott also wants his congregation to remember their stories. He encourages them to keep a journal so they can trace how God's work in their lives has changed their attitudes toward family, work, and other Christians. He also stressed the importance of community groups as places for spiritual formation in the years following baptism. Community plays a significant role in Charles' general approach to spiritual formation as well; in fact, he views the congregation, rather than professionals, as the first place for fellow members to get counseling.

Mark desires his congregants to remember their baptism because this is a "lifelong living into and identity-forming practice." Fostering this baptismal identity is important to his ongoing pastoral care, as he counsels them to remember that baptism has marked them for who they are. In this way, addicts may find hope that there is a power strong enough to break their addiction; those who are ruled by their schedule may reassess how they are spending their time; and the people who are caught up in the defining moments in their lives—whether successes or failures—can reframe those moments by putting baptism at the center. Similarly, Phil described remembering baptism

as an opportunity to shake off "spiritual amnesia." If believers have come to believe that the truest things about themselves are their successes or failures, looking back on their baptism reminds them that "the truest thing about [them] is that [they] are His."

Remembering takes a different shape for children. For adults, much instruction and spiritual formation takes place before baptism. For children, it occurs in the years following as they come to understand baptism and Christianity. Mark and Brett talked about several ways that they engage children during baptism services. Mark has the children come forward and speaks directly to them about baptism. Right after baptism, during the time of greeting, he shakes their hands with his own still-wet hand in order to give them a tangible reminder of what just happened. Brett also asks the children to sit in the front during the ceremony, and he invites one of them to participate by pouring the water into the bowl during the prayer over the water.

Several pastors spoke of ways that they equip parents to raise their children into their baptisms, typically through providing catechism questions for use at home. Mark noted the importance of talking to children about baptism from an early age; he actually has revised one of the standard children's catechisms, placing the questions about baptism much earlier in order to solidify the connection between baptism and other aspects of the Christian faith. Scott also gives parents a children's catechism, but he stressed that in order for children to grow in faith, it is just as important for their parents to grow in theirs. When he teaches his middle-school-communicant membership class, Scott repeats to the teenagers what he told their parents back when they were baptized: they received the promise of the covenant when they were "totally unaware." But now, their desire to "publicly make a profession of faith" shows these children that "God has

kept His covenant promise."

The community plays a more obvious role in a child's ongoing baptismal formation than an adult's, by teaching the child about remembering baptism. This begins with the baptism service itself; each of these congregations promises to aid the parents in the spiritual nurture of the child. Mark, in particular, makes this vow very explicit. He walks the child down the aisles, introduces him or her to the congregation, and instructs the members of the church "to remind [the child] of the gospel . . . of this event . . . of what it means for you." This rhetoric impresses upon the congregation the significance of the vow they have just made and will be reminded of again at future baptisms.

Corporate Worship

Each pastor was asked to reflect on the ways that corporate worship implicitly and explicitly embodies the meaning of baptism and aids in baptismal formation. Some of the interviewees commented on how non-believers on the path to their own baptism might grow in understanding of the rite. Most, however, focused on how believers experience spiritual formation after receiving baptism.

Each pastor pointed out the relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper, and between baptism and the sermon. Both baptism and communion are sacraments. Earlier in his career, when he was a church planter, Charles instituted "Sacrament Sundays," holding communion on the same day as a baptism in order to establish the "specialness and sobriety" of the two rites. During the Lord's Supper, Mark reminds his congregation that communion is for those who have identified with Christ in baptism, which he believes "deepens [their] baptismal union" with Him. Brett speaks of communion in terms of renewing the covenant of baptism, drawing a parallel between

when the Israelites celebrated Passover in Egypt and when they passed through the Red Sea. Phil links baptism with the Lord's Supper at the beginning of each communion service, speaking directly to non-believers and inviting them into the community through baptism. Similarly, Jeff instructs non-believers on the significance of baptism during communion services: one of the printed prayers he provides for those not taking the Lord's Supper explicitly mentions baptism.

However, although communion services do provide opportunities to teach both believers and non-believers about baptism, the pastors all said the sermon—whether specifically or indirectly addressing baptism—is the most important pedagogical site for baptismal formation. In a recent sermon he preached on Luke 3, Brett tied Christ's obedience to the Father in baptism with "our saying yes" to God. Charles makes sure to elaborate on the same aspect of the means of grace in both the baptismal preface and in the post-baptismal sermon. Both Mark and Phil intentionally refer periodically to baptism in their sermons. Scott noted that preaching on the sacraments helps people comprehend their importance, and he lamented that over his career, he did not do it as often as he would now. He also connected the importance of the sermon with "the ongoing shaping of one's life and heart" that began with baptism.

A few pastors said that the baptismal font helps people connect baptism with regular Sunday worship. During his sermons, whenever Phil invokes God's pronouncement, "You are my beloved," he walks over to the baptismal font and uses it as a visual aid. Brett encourages his congregation to dip their fingers in the water of the font as they come forward to receive communion. Mark noted that he wishes his congregation had a permanent font, perhaps for reasons similar to Phil's and Brett's.

In addition to commenting on these explicit connections, each pastor was asked whether other moments in the worship service implicitly demonstrate the meaning of baptism. Several interviewees briefly mentioned regular worship elements, like the Call to Worship, the Confession of Sin and Assurance of Pardon, the Creedal Confession of Faith, and the Benediction. According to Scott, the Call to Worship acknowledges Christ as King and reminds the congregation that God is calling people to himself to give them a new heart. Mark uses Creeds in his baptism service, and he hopes his congregation will make the connection to baptism when they recite a Creed on other Sundays. Mark also characterized the Benediction, which sends people out "as priests into the world to mediate God's presence, both individually and corporately," as a baptismal mission. Brett described the Confession of Sin in terms of "putting off, putting on . . . dying and rising." And he claimed that although the Confession is not in "the same exact key as baptism… it's a closely related key that makes it resonate." Furthermore, Brett asserted, "If you'll pay attention, if you'll look, you'll see the same notes that are played in baptism. They're all over the liturgy." However, notwithstanding these examples, there did not seem to be an expectation that on a given Sunday, people would draw an obvious connection between any of the elements and their baptism.

Three pastors commented on the pedagogic and experiential connections between singing and baptism. Mark lamented the scarcity of songs about baptism, because singing about "devoting our lives, or giving ourselves to God, or how He has claimed us, or is ours" resonates with baptismal identity, whether people know it or not. Song selection is important to Charles as they are "so instructive," but rather than singing songs about "the experience of baptism," he prefers to choose songs about "the benefits of salvation."

Scott stressed the importance of the song following the sermon, which offers people an opportunity to respond to the way God is shaping their hearts through the preaching of His Word.

Most of the interviewees agreed that the entire worship service is an opportunity to shape congregants' understanding of baptism. Scott pointed out that the structure of the worship service—an external call, an internal call, and a response to God's Word—follows the order of salvation, saying this is "like a reenacting of baptism." Jeff referred to the "gospel cycle" of the liturgy; this is intended to shape people's vision of "the good life," both for Christians and non-Christians. According to Jeff, the Christian vision of the good life means being reconciled to God, "the very reality that baptism is about." Mark believes that since "the whole worship service is identity forming," people gain tacit knowledge of their baptismal identity without even realizing it. Similarly, Phil noted that whether they know it or not, congregants are participating in "the story of the gospel from beginning to end" in both the liturgical calendar and the worship service itself, and baptism is at the heart of this. Brett takes this a step further; he continually invites people to participate in God's story throughout the liturgy and the year, and if they have responded to that call, he believes that "they [are] surely living out their baptism."

Summary of Steps Toward Baptismal Formation

The participants described many ways that baptismal formation takes place in the context of their ministry, both in preparing people for baptism and in returning to baptism in the years that follow. They teach new believers and parents about what happens during baptism and how it will play out in the years that follow. They give little specific preparation to the congregation, however, although there is the expectation that seeing

baptism practiced provides spiritual formation for non-believers, enabling them to come to an understanding of baptism and Christianity.

All of the interviewees discussed the significance of remembering baptism. When addressing adult recipients, the pastors explain aspects of covenant renewal, talk about the ongoing formation amidst the community, and remind them of their identity in Christ. For children growing up into the promises of their baptisms, the pastors take a more instructional approach. They engage directly with children during the baptism ceremony, teach them through catechism questions, and involve the community in nurturing their spiritual growth.

Finally, the pastors discussed the aspects of corporate worship that connect with the meaning of baptism. Communion, the sermon, and the baptismal font are explicitly linked with baptism, but most other elements of worship have implicit links. This includes singing, which offers congregants a way to access the heart of the meaning of baptism. Also, the structure of the worship service, which explains and embodies the gospel message, allows the meaning of baptism to be lived out in each service.

Effects of Baptismal Formation

The final research question asked what outcomes pastors expect to see in their congregants as a result of baptismal formation practices. Their answers took on specific applications from each of their ministries and tangibly related to the first research question about baptism and spiritual formation. The effects they have seen and hope to see in their congregants are spiritual maturity, a turning toward God, and an assurance of faith. Additionally, they all expect to see an impact on the parents raising children in faith. A few of them also shared ways in which their personal baptism experiences have

shaped their ministries.

Maturity in spiritual identity was a primary effect of spiritual formation that these pastors have seen over time in their congregants. For Mark, this is exhibited in the way people deal with interpersonal conflict. He related an example of a staff member whose elder had hurt their feelings. Rather than triangulating and being pulled into the situation, Mark encouraged this person to go directly to the elder. Continuing to do this after the first instance was a sign of their developing maturity. Scott also views a changed approach to relationships as a sign of maturity. He encourages people to keep a journal so they can see for themselves how they are maturing spiritually as they live into community. Charles highlighted the importance of tracking "the trajectory of maturity, to inspect some of the fruit." For him, it is important to be in relationship with someone who can say, "You used to be this, and now you're that."

Phil believes living counter-culturally is a sign of maturity. To grow into baptism is to go against the prevailing "give the least and get the most" mentality. This mentality may be "a great formula for buying a car or sweater, but [is] a terrible way to build a relationship" and it opposes the principles of Christian living and community. In this sense, church membership itself is counter-cultural. Phil also desires his congregants to develop a counter-cultural attitude toward their neighborhood. "If you're a person of faith and you follow the Savior who saw the pain in the world and entered into it and took it on, then [you] should pattern [your] lives after him and move into the pain of [your] neighborhood." Phil believes that those who find their identity in Christ will seek reconciliation with the world and not just with other Christians.

A second outcome of baptismal formation, according to all six pastors, is a turn

toward God. This is true for people who have just become believers, people who have strayed from the faith for a period of time, and people turning part of their lives back to God. When Brett exhorts his congregation to remember their baptism, he is telling them to turn toward God. Mark encourages people to "reassess what they're spending their time and life and purpose on" and turn to God. Jeff equates turning to God with living out the renunciation of sin.

Assurance of salvation and identity in Christ is another theme that came up in the interviews. Scott counsels new believers that although they will be tempted to sin and believe that their new identity "doesn't make [them] any different," their baptisms show that they are "no longer [children] of darkness." Mark and Phil want their congregants to see baptism as the defining moment in their lives and realize that their identity in Christ is central to their being, and not get caught up in temporal success or failure.

Scott and Mark both gave insights into baptismal formation through parenting. Scott said that mature parents realize that only God can change the heart of their child—they themselves don't have that power. Instead, their responsibility is "to pray with them, to read the scriptures with them, to catechize them into growing in Christ, and see the reality of Jesus in [their lives]." Scott prays that these children one day will say, "Why did I know that Jesus was real? Because I knew that my mother and dad knew him." He highlighted the role of the community in nurturing children, saying that his own children have benefitted from the teaching of adults who were not their parents. Scott regretfully admitted that although he spends a good deal of time teaching and equipping parents before their child's baptism, he does not follow up with them afterwards as much as he does with adults that he has baptized.

Mark is planning a quarterly series for training and equipping parents. The first class is on teaching children about the sacraments, and he will distribute his restructured catechism, which prominently foregrounds baptismal identity, to the attendees. In order to instill a baptismal identity in their children, Mark encourages parents to talk about baptism on a weekly or even daily basis, not just when it happens in church.

Two of the pastors reflected on their own stories, which offered unexpected insights into how they practice baptism in their particular contexts. Brett grew up in a predominantly Baptist culture, and was baptized twice at different points in his life. In college, he converted to Anglicanism and changed his mind about the meaning of baptism. After attending graduate school, he returned to his home state as a priest. Many of the people in his congregation today hold the Baptist perspective of his childhood, but he is careful to "[be] gentle with people and pastoral with people, and [walk] with them at their own pace," rather than take an antagonistic approach to opposing viewpoints.

Charles was christened in a church where "there was no fire . . . no depth of theology." Becoming a Christian later in life was "such a powerful transition" that he can remember the exact date and time it happened. The elders of his Presbyterian church made the rare decision to allow Charles to be re-baptized as an adult, since there was no way to gauge his parents' faith and whether the covenant promises really were passed on when he was baptized as a child. Charles realizes that his experience is not normative, however, and this "[tempers] how [he] speaks with other people about [his baptism]." For both Brett and Charles, their baptismal identities inform their ministries; their personal experiences of baptism shape their approaches to shepherding their people.

Summary of Effects of Baptismal Formation

Each interviewee talked about what baptismal formation they expected or hoped to see in their congregants. Maturity, both in changed attitudes toward other Christians as well as in changed attitudes toward the surrounding culture, was an obvious answer. They also mentioned turning to God at all stages of spiritual development, and finding assurance of salvation in order to deal with temptation, failure, and success. Some of the pastors commented on how parents contribute to their children's baptismal formation, but there was no consistent description of what this looks like. For two participants, their own testimony of baptism has shaped the way they go about fostering baptismal formation in congregants.

Summary of Findings

This chapter has explored how six different pastors treat baptism and corporate worship as opportunities for the spiritual formation of their congregants. Some of them intentionally link baptismal identity with the process of spiritual formation, while others see the connection but did not share deliberate methods of carrying this out for their congregation. They emphasize the importance of testimony and story for those preparing for baptism, but there was not much consideration of how that story carries on in the time following after baptism. The interviewees connected baptism with the ongoing nature of spiritual formation, or sanctification, mainly as the event that sets people on the path of spiritual formation instead of a continual source of direction and strength.

Throughout their interviews, the pastors consistently described how they convey the meaning of baptism to their congregations. All participants employed pedagogical techniques, feeling it necessary to teach their congregations about what happens during

baptism. Not every participant shared that they intentionally allow their congregants to experience the meaning of baptism in the context of the ceremony; however, they all alluded to ways in which the practices embody the meaning of baptism.

Each pastor has similar procedures for preparing people to come to baptism. This preparation is an opportunity both to instruct participants about baptism and to examine the sincerity of the participants' faith. In addition, they view preparation for infant baptism as a means for parents to be involved in the post-baptismal formation of their child. A few of the pastors shared concrete ways in which they equip and encourage parents at this time: specifically, they use a catechism for instruction and emphasize the need for parents to live out their faith in front of their children.

Each pastor related how he invites his congregants to remember their baptism. For most, this takes place when they invite the congregation to participate in the ceremony by remembering their own past experience of baptism. Only two pastors mentioned that they take time outside of the context of corporate worship to instruct their members to remember baptism, and for both, this was in the context of pastoral counseling.

Each pastor spoke about the concept of connecting baptism with the rest of corporate worship. The unity of communion with baptism, both sacraments, was an obvious connection made by all. Each pastor also related ways in which the sermon helps people understand the meaning of baptism, as the subject or the application. They made implicit connections between baptism and other elements of the service, like singing and order of service (which mirrors the message of the gospel and is wrapped up in various meanings of baptism). However, none of the pastors have come up with consistent methods to illustrate these connections for their congregants.

The interviewees came up with diverse lists of desired outcomes of baptismal formation, and these were related closely to how each pastor described the process of spiritual formation. All participants identified maturity as a sign of spiritual formation, pointing specifically to transforming attitudes within the church community and toward the surrounding culture, yet only a few connected this maturity with baptism. Many strongly connected turning to God with baptism, although they tended to see this in conjunction with people turning to God for the first time and not as a continual turning to God at all stages of spiritual growth. A few pastors brought up assurance of salvation, based on the Christian's identity in Christ found in baptism. All of the paedobaptists touched on parenting and spiritual growth, yet only Scott and Mark reflected on how this might actually take place and both of them believe there is more to be done in this area. One unexpected topic in the process of spiritual formation was the impact of the pastor's personal experience of baptism. Brett and Charles told their stories of coming to faith and baptism, and reflected on how their experiences inform how they pastor people who are themselves in the process of understanding baptism.

The next chapter shares the conclusions derived from this research. The contents of the literature review and the data from the research interviews will be compared and contrasted in order to find practical ways in which baptismal formation happens in congregations. The study will evaluate the capacity of the practice of baptism—as well as all of corporate worship—to convey the meaning of baptism and stimulate spiritual growth in congregants.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

The study was designed to explore how pastors' conduct of corporate worship services helps congregants connect the practice of baptism to the pursuit of spiritual formation. Four research questions framed the study:

1. How do pastors describe the role baptism plays in the process of spiritual formation?
2. How do pastors understand the interaction between the theology and the practices of baptism in the lives of their congregants?
3. What steps do pastors take to foster baptismal formation in their congregants
    a. while preparing for baptism?
    b. in the years following baptism?
4. What outcomes do pastors desire to observe in congregants engaged in baptismal formation?

In this chapter, I present the conclusions of the study. I summarize the findings of the literature review and the research interviews, draw conclusions from the research, and offer recommendations for practice and for further study.

Summary of Study and Findings

This research project reviewed relevant literature in three areas and analyzed interview data from six pastors. The review of biblical and historical literature highlighted various connections between baptism and identity. The review of practice theory showed the relationship between practices and narratives in the process of identity

formation. In the chapter analyzing the interview data, I outlined the links between baptism and spiritual formation that the pastors brought up, and discussed their methods for connecting the two for their congregants.

Summary of Literature Review

The first section of the literature review, which developed a biblical theological framework for baptismal practice, explored the biblical provenance of baptismal practices in churches today and throughout history. Although the Bible does not contain a definitive baptismal liturgy, it does teach about the meaning of baptism and provide guidance about how Christians should practice baptism. Meaning and practice were considered in the literature review. First, I analyzed baptism in terms of the covenant relationship between God and his people, specifically investigating whether there is continuity between circumcision and baptism as signs of the covenant. Baptism bestows covenant identity for individuals and communities who are in relationship with God.

Next, I outlined the scholarly analysis of three key concepts found in the Four Gospels that set the scene for baptism during Jesus' ministry. The first concept was applicability. The literature revealed a wide variety of interpretations of the extent to which the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist can be applied to Christian baptism today. Jesus' baptism certainly demonstrated his earthly identity as God's Son at the start of his ministry; theologians dispute whether Christian baptism is meant to imitate or to be informed by Christ's baptism to any degree. The second concept was the place of the Trinity. Jesus included baptism in the Great Commission as part of his parting mission statement to his followers. As baptism is to be done in the name of the Trinity, baptismal identity clearly stands in relationship to the Trinity. The third key baptismal concept

found in the Gospels is new identity. The most cited second-century text on baptism is Jesus' words to Nicodemus describing the new birth.[496] Although it is unclear whether Jesus was describing water baptism, his words point to the nature of the new identity bestowed on those who receive baptism.

Descriptions of baptism in the Book of Acts are brief. Scholarly literature attempts to reveal how the first hearers would have understood baptism in relationship to the Old Testament covenants. Baptism was an important marker of identity as the margins of Christendom expanded with the spread of the gospel message.

Finally, the letters of the Apostles reveal many layers of meaning for Spirit baptism and indirectly for water baptism, although it is possible these practices originally were tied to each other. Reviewing the literature on the letters of the Apostles reminds us that there are many ways to illustrate the meaning of baptism using the symbols and practices of baptism. All of the passages emphasize how baptism points to a new identity, which then flows into the recipient's relationship with God and the Christian community. These passages also show how to live in light of baptismal identity.

The second section of the literature review, which explores the historical development of baptism, traces the evolution of baptismal practice and theology. Baptism took shape as the early church grew, and while there was overlap and borrowing of practices between different churches, the ritual did not take on a definitive shape in the early church. As the churches in the East and the West centralized geographically, however, distinct understandings of baptism also formed. Scholars show that in the East, Christians were beginning to imitate Christ's baptism; in the West, they symbolically

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[496] Ferguson, 142-143.

joined in Christ's death and resurrection. These distinctions were codified in practices, which themselves informed and shaped the lives of Christians and their communities.

The literature on the Protestant Reformation focuses on how church leaders sought a simpler baptismal rite than that which had expanded during the Medieval Church. The theology was clarified and the practices were simplified so that the meaning of baptism could be readily understood and applied to Christian living. Scholars have examined different liturgical prayers to observe how the Reformers engaged the intersection of practice and theology.[497] Witvliet, in particular, looks at John Calvin's theme of the "double grace" of baptism.[498] Baptism holds together the aspects of justification and sanctification regarding the Christian's union with Christ and offers assurance to the Christian who is struggling with the power of sin.

Reviewing the literature on the Westminster Assembly reveals that their sacramental theology, laid out in the Westminster Standards, was in line with Calvin's theology of the instrumental nature of the sacraments, despite their divergent, almost Zwinglian memorialist approach to baptismal liturgy. Scholars have also pointed to another important distinctive in Westminster theology, found in the catechism question on "improving baptism." While continental Reformed theology emphasized that God was the primary actor in baptism, the Westminster Divines sought to incorporate the importance of human agency, albeit in light of God's gracious action.

Literature analyzing the modern period reveals the tension created when reforming baptismal theology and practice across denominational lines. The PC(USA)'s

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[497] See Appendix B for a collection of baptismal prayers.

[498] Witvliet, 152.

BCW was an attempt to balance adopting liturgical reforms in line with the broader ecumenical movement with maintaining the theological distinctives of the denomination. The BCW received mixed advocacy in the literature; scholars criticized the ways its baptismal liturgies minimized covenant theology and de-emphasized God's grace. Additionally, scholars pointed out an apparent disconnect in the vows for parents in the PCA's BCO, which includes a reference to the dedication of the child. These two examples underscore the need for pastors and denominations to strive for congruence between their theological convictions and congregational practices.

The third section of the literature review explored the role of practices and narrative in identity formation. This section presented different models for defining a practice, and compared and contrasted the approaches of Bourdieu and MacIntyre. Bourdieu's description of *habitus*, with its smaller scope and focus on everyday action, was found to be more readily applicable in the context of ministry than MacIntyre's more all-encompassing approach that focuses on "internal goods" and the development of virtue. Flowing from these theories of practice, scholars debate the interplay of practice and belief. Anderson claims that they are "mutually causative," and does not give priority to one over the other.[499] Additionally, Christian scholars, when measuring the effectiveness of a practice, acknowledge God's grace; they do not solely consider human effort. The literature on modern communities shows how narratives instill meaning into practices and orient practitioners to the past, the present, and the future. Practices, in turn, embed narratives into the identity of practitioners in the midst of community, together transforming individual self-identity by making sense of new experiences.

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[499] Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity*, 29.

Summary of the Interview Data

The first research question explored the connections that pastors find between baptism and spiritual formation. The interviews show that the nature of spiritual formation is linked to baptism in many ways. The root of spiritual formation is found in the way baptism ties the individual into God's story. Baptism creates a new identity for the individual, as he or she is invited on a journey through spiritual formation. Baptism draws individuals into their new community, both the place of welcome and the place for spiritual formation. Finally, spiritual formation necessitates continually returning to baptism through the process of sanctification—how a person's being and actions grow into the image of Christ—also described as living into baptism.

In the second research question, I asked pastors to talk about the interaction between the theology and practices of baptism. Their answers fell into two categories: pedagogic and experiential. Pedagogic elements included explaining the meaning of baptism to participants and the congregation, outside of the context of the actual ceremony. Experiential elements expressed the meaning of baptism during the ceremony itself, and included the content of the prayers, the frequency of baptisms performed during the year, and the placement of baptism in the service.

The third research question examined how pastors enable baptismal formation, both during the time leading up to the ceremony and in the following years. The interviewees described many ways that pre-baptismal formation takes place in the context of ministry. They prepare new believers and parents by teaching them about what happens in baptism as well as how the effects of baptism will play out in the years that follow. They tend to give little specific preparation to the congregation, although there is

a general expectation that seeing baptism practiced contributes to the spiritual formation of those non-believers who eventually come to an understanding of baptism and Christianity.

While each pastor intentionally formulates plans for preparing their congregants for baptism, their post-baptismal strategies are more varied and organic. A common theme running through the interviews was the importance of remembering baptism for both adults and children. When directing adults to remember their baptisms, the pastors explain aspects of covenant renewal, point to the ongoing formation amidst the community, and remind them of their identity in Christ. The pastors take a more instructional approach with children who are growing up into the promises of their baptisms: they engage directly with children during the baptism ceremony, they use catechism questions to teach them, and they involve the community in nurturing the children's spiritual growth.

Many of the interviewees pointed out that corporate worship could enable formation before or after baptism. Although this complicated my attempt to differentiate between pre- and post-baptismal strategies, the pastors did bring up several concrete ways to connect worship with baptism. Baptism can be referenced directly in communion services and sermons, and highlighted visually with the baptismal font. It can be referenced implicitly in other elements of worship, including singing, which offers congregants a way to connect with the heart of the meaning of baptism. Furthermore, the structure of the worship service itself, as far as it explains and embodies the gospel message, allows the meaning of baptism to be lived out in each service.

The final research question asked what outcomes pastors expect to see in their

congregants as a result of baptismal formation practices. Most of them cited maturity, both in changed attitudes toward other Christians as well as in changed attitudes toward the surrounding culture. They also mentioned turning to God at all stages of spiritual development, as well as finding assurance of salvation in order to deal with temptation and with success or failure. Some touched on the ways in which parents raise their children, but no one gave a consistent description of what would look like. Two of the interviewees shared how their own testimonies of baptism have shaped the way they pastor others. This personal element was an unexpected detail that arose during the interview process.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, I integrate the literature and the research data in order to identify practical methods for pastors to use in corporate worship services. These methods will help congregants connect the practice of baptism to the pursuit of spiritual formation. The following summary, shaped by the themes of the primary research questions, synthesizes concepts and theories from the literature review and places them in relation to the interview analysis.

Baptism and Spiritual Formation

In surveying the literature of practice, it became evident to me that the study of identity formation draws from many different disciplines. The journey toward understanding and defining practice and formation has many trailheads, but the one path that I kept bumping into was the relationship between narrative and practice. I think that I was drawn to this theme, and the reason it continues to be addressed in the literature, because Christians, by nature, are a people of stories. The Bible conveys its message in

the form of a narrative. Even its laws, whether moral or ceremonial, are couched in the story of God and his people. The greatest act in redemptive history was when God entered into the human story as Jesus Christ in order to redeem his people by his death and resurrection. Christ's work both moved the story forward by repairing the broken relationship between God and humans, and signaled the coming end to the story in his triumph over death and the beginning the process of restoring all of creation.

Redemptive history centers on the relationship between God and his people. It is when this relationship is restored that Christians receive a new identity and a new motivation. Spiritual formation is the process of living into that identity and redirecting motivations. Through God's saving work, Christians are given a new story—as well as a new perspective on the old story of their life before baptism. Baptism is the practice that both signals this transition and embodies all that is secured in salvation by uniting us to Christ. Spiritual formation finds its initiation and its stimulation in the context of baptism. All this is what prompted me to probe into the connections between baptism and spiritual formation.

The practice of baptism unites the plot line of several stories that are being told concurrently. The literature and interviews drew attention to four stories in particular, all inseparable from Christian identity: encountering God's great story, rewriting the individual's story, entering the community's story, and the story of the journey of Christian living.

Encountering God's Great Story

In God's story, baptism is first and foremost based upon his gracious action toward individuals. As the interviewees pointed out, baptism places recipients within the

stream of God's story. Before performing the ceremony, the pastors focus primarily on finding out how God has been at work in each person's life to bring them to the moment of baptism. According to Jacobson's analysis of narrative, sin makes people incapable "either of knowing the whole truth or of telling the truth when [they] do know it."[500] They need an alternative, outside story that tells the truth about human identity and allows them to make sense of new experiences and transform self-definition into a particular identity.

God's story also is told in regard to the issue of re-baptism. Some who have received baptism will stray or fall away from the faith, and, after a time, will return to the church and make a renewed profession of faith. Congregations who consider the original baptism to be valid and refuse to re-baptize the individual are saying that this person entered God's story the first time, that the story did not end when they left, and that, in fact, it has continued to the point that they are now returning to claim those earlier promises. As Phil described it, "God was present the first time [they] were baptized. Seeds were planted that the Spirit has been watering that are now coming above the soil."

One way that the pastors connect baptismal practice with God's story is by tying it into the liturgical calendar, which traces the story of Jesus every year. Early churches adopted this practice, holding baptisms at the beginning of Epiphany or during Easter. Phil and Brett serve congregations that follow the calendar, and they both pointed out that certain Sundays in the church year express themes identified with baptism. There is a practical benefit, as well, since many of the baptism Sundays are predetermined by the liturgical calendar. Churches that do not follow the liturgical calendar, or that observe

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[500] Jacobson, 125.

only the "Evangelical Feast Days" of Christmas and Easter, must create other opportunities to encounter God's great story in their baptismal practices. Some highlight the major scriptural themes of baptism that intersect with the story of redemption: God's covenant relationship with his people, God's identifying Jesus as his Son at his baptism, and baptism uniting us with the death and resurrection of Christ. Others express the story of baptism through the baptismal prayers. They take guidance from the early church, Luther, and other divines who elaborated on the full spectrum of redemptive history as it relates to the waters of baptism.

Rewriting the Individual's Story

As a rite of initiation, baptism admits recipients into a direct relationship with God and with his people. Baptism writes us into God's great story and gives us a new name. Understanding that baptism is not just about God's story but also about the individual's story highlights the critical role human action plays in maintaining this relationship.

There is an element of obedience in receiving baptism. However, there also is a temptation to make baptism about our own small story by relying solely on a personal statement of faith, and effectively cutting out the other related stories. Warning against the prevalent culture of individualism that has had so much influence on views of baptism, Grenz points out, "Our personal stories are never isolated units."[501] An individualistic mindset makes me the sole arbiter of what is right and wrong, a critical element of the "expressive individualism" described by Bellah and his colleagues. The antidote to an individualistic mindset is to situate one's small story in relationship to

[501] Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 425.

other stories, big and small. Baptism does this, enabling recipients to enter into the stories of God and his people.

Scott said that baptism is not simply a rite of passage. I interpret this to mean that baptism does not simply mark the passing of time or signify a status change, like a graduation or a retirement party do. The world may view baptism as no more than a family obligation. However, this reduces the ceremony to a mere tradition, and obscures the identity-changing story that it effects.

Baptismal practices can counter the effects of individualism and engage personal identity in several ways. First, recipients actively participate in the ceremony, typically through reciting vows and creeds in which they profess their faith and claim it as their own. Second, renunciations of sin offer an even more vivid expression of the vow to follow in the ways of Christ's active obedience. Third, pastors can highlight how Christ's passive obedience was tied to baptism: he gave up his identity through death on the cross, paying the penalty of sin in order to offer his identity to those who trust in him by faith.

Entering the Community's Story

Communities shape and are shaped by the individuals who join them. As a public act, baptism enjoins the community to participate in the individual's spiritual formation and calls the individual to participate in community formation. Making baptism public was one of the key reforms of the Protestant Reformation, turning what had been a private family affair into a public witness of God's grace. Many baptisms include a congregational vow to nurture the recipients. As long as they are a part of the community, the congregation will play a role in the development of their stories, whether for good or for ill. Members of the community will be Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders,

and choir members who will shape and inform their understanding of God and their perception of his grace. The church may be a driving force behind recipients drawing near to or being driven away from Christ. Therefore, the congregational vow is not something to be taken lightly, and the congregation's participation in baptism is just as important as God's and the recipient's.

Baptism also plays a vital role in the development of the community's story. Baptism is the sole identifying mark received by all Christians, and the community should celebrate it as such. In the interviews, each pastor identified ways for baptism to be best celebrated in their congregation. For example, Jeff schedules at least one baptism at each one of his five worship services on Baptism Sundays, so that everyone gets to witness it. The celebration of baptism should be an important marker for congregations in the same way that it is important for individuals. For church plants, baptisms signal the lives being changed as the gospel reaches into the community in new ways. Baptism also signals the ongoing work of the gospel in established congregations, as individuals move from being long-time observers to participants in the community's story, and as children are carried upon the wave of covenant baptism into the community. Baptism also signals growth in aging congregations that have not increased in membership for quite some time. When new converts or families are baptized into the community, the ceremony celebrates God's work in bringing new people into the church that has been long absent from the community, and it serves as a long overdue reminder of how the congregants' own baptisms mark their identity in Christ. All of these stories brought up in the interviews illustrate how the recurring practice of baptism celebrates receiving new individuals into the shared identity of God's people.

Baptism embodies what Bellah calls the "practices of commitment." These are practices that are shaped by the community and shape the individuals entering the community. However, this shaping is not only a force for change in individuals, but also a force for change in the community as a whole. Pastors would do well to go beyond merely preaching to their congregants about baptism. They should engage them as participants in the ceremony using vows, creeds, songs, and prayers, all of which incorporate baptism into the shared story and vocabulary of the community at large.

The Story of the Journey of Christian Living

Being united to Christ in baptism not only places a new name upon the recipient but also inaugurates a new way of living. Baptism is not only the "why" of Christian living; it is also the "how" of Christian living. It sets people on the journey of taking on Christ's identity. Christian living is informed by the intersection of God's story, individual's stories, and the community's story. As MacIntyre noted, "I can only answer the question 'What can I do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"[502] According to Phil, "What baptism says in the moment is an invitation for us to live out for the rest of our lives." This new way of living is itself a story: although many people describe their journey of coming to Christ as the period before their baptism, their post-baptism life is also the journey of coming to Christ. This subsequent journey is sometimes described as the process of sanctification. Calvin called it the double grace of baptism: the process of dying to sin and rising to new life.

Baptism gives believers a new story. But it is often difficult to break completely free from the old stories. So baptism reinterprets them in light of God's great story, and

[502] MacIntyre, 216.

reassures believers that their new identity is secure—no matter what power these old stories may seem to have. Mark noted that baptism gives addicts hope that there is power to overcome their addiction. Phil remarked that baptism prevents people from being defined by their successes and failures

Baptismal practices should challenge Christians to live out their baptism, revisiting it on an ongoing basis as the spark and the fuel for spiritual formation and identity transformation. Inviting the congregation to remember their baptism is one step in this direction. Jeff's practice of annually renewing the membership covenant is another way to make baptismal renewal concrete. Other pastors incorporate practices by using biblical images of baptism tied to sanctification. Some give a white garment to the recipient, visually illustrating the principle of taking off the old self and putting on the new self. Others hand out candles after baptism, symbolizing the turn from darkness to light. Finally, congregations illustrate how believers die and rise with Christ by baptizing by immersion (and emersion).

Theology and Practice of Baptism

Another area of interest that informed my research was the interaction between the theology and practice of baptism, more specifically looking at how practice shapes our beliefs, or *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Writing from a Reformed perspective, the centrality of God's Word is accentuated in worship by an emphasis on the proclamation of God's Word. The predominance of the sermon in worship services is not only found in the arena of Reformed denominations but is also exhibited in many other Evangelical churches. I certainly affirm that the sermon does play a vital role in shaping belief in order to live, but I also have come to see the value in other practices that act as means of

grace and exhibit God's grace to his people. I hoped that this research would find ways to connect the practices of baptism, as well as the rest of worship, with how participants come to believe what baptism does over time. The literature and interview data delved into this from various perspectives, but it also took a different direction than I expected to find when I started.

Pedagogy as Practice

Initially, when I began this study, I wanted to move away from the Presbyterian habit of talking a lot before performing the baptism. I saw more explication of baptismal practices than practices in action. Directing the congregation toward right belief was prioritized to the point that the water baptism itself felt subordinate. The application of water is so momentary, and I believed that engaging the congregation with the mystery and meaning of baptism required something more than discourse alone.

However, my perspective changed after studying the literature and conducting the interviews. I now regard the pre-baptismal pedagogical element as an essential part of the practice, at least in Presbyterian and Reformed congregations. Spinks criticized Calvin for teaching theology "by explication," instead of by liturgical form and content.[503] However, as Mikoski points out, Calvin's approach can also be understood positively as "ecclesial pedagogy."[504] Witvliet agrees, connecting Calvin's approach with the mystagogical catechesis used by the likes of Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose of Milan. Each of the pastors interviewed described pedagogic approaches to help his congregation—made up of both believers and non-believers—understand what is

[503] Spinks, "Calvin's Baptismal Theology," 74.

[504] Mikoski, 183.

happening in baptism. Moreover, even some experiential elements of baptism can fall under this pedagogic category. Jeff provides liturgies that explain the meaning of baptism through responsive readings. And creeds, originally developed to instruct baptismal candidates in the basic truths of the faith, may be recited during the baptism ceremony as a profession of faith.

Now, at the end of the study, I have reframed my approach and believe that all of worship should have a teaching or pedagogic component, whether it is expressed in words or action. Teaching itself is a practice and should be cultivated as such. But instead of relying solely on didacticism to teach their congregations, pastors should also consider embodying their teaching in practices in order to create impact. As Spinks pointed out, "A meagre liturgy suggests a meagre sacrament,"[505] and enriching baptism with experiential elements provides a fuller perspective on the sacrament and raises its esteem in the eyes of the congregation. Mark and Brett engage children in the experiential aspects of the ceremony in order to highlight an important point: children learn about the meaning of their baptism after the fact. Their approach follows Calvin's injunction to teach the congregation about the meaning of their previously received baptism.[506]

The Practice of Defending Baptism

I believe that the pastoral propensity to explain baptism stems from their struggle to let actions speak for themselves. I do agree with Charles, who argued that pastors should make the meaning straightforward enough to be understood by everyone gathered. But is it possible for practices to be understood without an abundance of explanation? Is

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[505] Spinks, "Calvin's Baptismal Theology," 74.

[506] Witvliet, 159.

it possible that a practice can be better understood when it is left to defend itself? Mark claimed that infant baptism is "its own defense and apologetic," although he acknowledged that he actually does spend a good amount of time explaining and defending it. Each of the pastors has congregants who came to believe in either paedobaptism or credobaptism. If it was the pastor's words alone that convinced them, then it might be worth prioritizing crafting a conclusive argument that changes minds on first hearing. But in fact, these congregants' minds were changed over time as they observed the way their congregations practiced baptism. Of course, teaching was part of this practice, but it took experiencing a combination of word and action in the midst of community to change their minds.

How one defends baptism is influenced by one's culture. The Reformers had to defend their approach against Roman Catholic and Anabaptist teachings; American paedobaptist churches have to defend infant baptism against the perspective of believer-only baptism prevalent in the United States today. I believe this prevalence is due to a low view of the sacraments, in turn informed by the culture of individualism, as described by Grenz, Castleman, and Brownson. Rather than emphasizing the primacy of God's gracious action in salvation, as espoused by Reformed theology, credobaptists emphasize the individual's personal statement of faith. People engaging with Christianity from an individualistic perspective chafe at the idea of children receiving baptism, since they have no choice in the matter.[507] This does not square with a covenantal reading of baptism in scripture, which attests to God's gracious action to all recipients of baptism.

[507] Not to say that this affects only congregations who practice infant baptism; there are certainly challenges to believer-only baptism presented by individualism.

Living into the Covenant

The section on early church history analyzed different practices that shaped and reflected the theology of baptism. Johnson described how the church in the East came to view baptism as an imitation of Christ's baptism, while the church in the West came to view baptism as symbolically joining in Christ's death and resurrection. He concluded, "How one thinks of baptism will shape how one views Christian life and identity."[508]

The theme of covenantal baptism ran throughout most of the interviews. In what ways might this view of baptism shape Christian identity, and in turn, what baptismal practices might better engage with the themes of covenant? The interviews showed that infant baptism is the primary covenantal practice; applying baptism to the children of covenant members is the sign of inclusion in the covenant community. The community's spiritual nurturing of the recipient—whether child or adult—is an important practice that extends from baptism. Pastors usually cite the covenant in their explanations of infant baptism. Covenant imagery is also expressed in the scriptural passages read before the ceremony, and in content of prayers, such as the thanksgiving over the water or the blessing of the recipient.[509]

Sowing (and Reaping) the Benefits of Practice

In my opinion, while Reformed churches correctly anticipate that theology shapes identity, they unfortunately are less disposed to acknowledge the ways in which practices also shape identity. In other words, we are better at creating theologians than practitioners. The source of this predicament is two-fold. First, the Protestant

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[508] Johnson, 113.

[509] See Appendix B for a few examples.

Reformation rightly emphasized restoring the doctrines of grace to the church, but this resulted in doctrine becoming the primary mode of Christian practice. Second, the Reformed emphasis on grace has overcorrected itself into a fear of doing anything that might be construed as works-righteousness.

But rather than casting out the doctrine-heavy approach in favor of one weighted toward practices, I propose infusing baptismal practices with rich illustrations, in the same manner as the World Council of Churches in BEM advocated the use of vivid signs. These practices will take into account the narrative quality of baptismal practice and how it provides an opportunity for people to become part of God's big story. Would congregations that practice a simple baptismal liturgy benefit from adding other elements to help their congregation absorb a broader and deeper understanding of baptism? On the flip side, might there be benefit in removing certain elements in order to restore focus on the core meaning of baptism? Either way, I see a vital opportunity for congregations to come to fresh understandings of the longstanding and deep truths of baptism through the recognition of the power of practice.

Steps Toward Baptismal Formation Before Baptism

After considering the interplay between theology and practice, I examined how the pastors see their congregants being shaped in their understanding of baptism. I broke the research question into two parts to see if the pastors intentionally approach baptismal formation differently for people who are preparing for baptism and people who have already experienced baptism. Since the impetus for this study was seeing how people grow up into their baptisms, I collected more data on post-baptismal formation. However, there are a handful of practices that work for both groups of people, most notably

incorporating baptismal themes into corporate worship, which I discuss in detail below.

Membership Process

Baptism is a requirement for membership in all the congregations surveyed, but it could just as easily be said that membership is a requirement to receive baptism. Though the literature review did not address this phenomenon, there are some baptisms today that take place outside of the context of church membership. These baptisms may be modeled after the baptisms described in the Book of Acts, which in most cases did not take place in the local assembly. However, in First Corinthians, Paul explicitly tied baptism to participation in the local church. From a covenant theology perspective, baptism is the requisite sign for membership in the community under the New Covenant, just as circumcision was under the Old Covenant. In the early church, baptism was a requirement for partaking in communion, the community meal. During the Reformation, baptism was connected to joining the visible church. In fact, Zwingli said that since water baptism was only a sign and conferred no spiritual change, the point of baptism was showing the church who its members were.

According to this framework, baptism can be described as a "practice of commitment" that assists outsiders entering the community to understand its beliefs.[510] The interviewed pastors all run membership classes, which are followed by individual meetings with the pastor or elder who hears the person's testimony and discerns the sincerity of their profession of faith. These standard membership procedures teach prospective recipients what members are expected to believe and how they are expected to act in the community; they also instill a sense of the gravity of baptism and

[510] Bellah et al., eds., 157.

membership. Through the practice of membership, the baptismal narrative of Christianity gets embedded in new Christians.

The practice of membership also serves as a reminder to Christians of the continuing significance of their baptism. This happens in two ways. First, when Christians join a new congregation and take membership vows, they reaffirm the validity of their baptism. (The topic of re-baptism was not addressed in the literature review, but some churches require baptism for all new members, even those who have been baptized before. I personally oppose this position, but it does highlight the role that baptism plays in some local churches.) Second, baptism establishes the ongoing relationship between the church and its members, enabling Christians to submit to church discipline in maturity and humility. According to Jeff, membership provides the context for both formative and corrective discipline. And when churches disavow the implications of baptism and church membership, they stop engaging with their members in discipline.[511]

Pre-Parenting Formation

Parents bringing their children to be baptized also benefit from pre-baptismal formation. The interviewees who practice infant baptism all brought up ways they teach and encourage parents. They focus on training the parents to take the lead in their children's post-baptismal formation, according to principles laid out in the Westminster Standards. Some of the pastors use catechisms created in conjunction with the Reformed confessions of faith to teach children about the Christian faith into which they are being

[511] In response to recent public failings of church leadership and discipline, this quote that was referenced in social media seemed relevant: "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 47.

baptized. Mark, in particular, wants children to understand that baptism is of primary importance to their identity. I advocate his approach to the catechism: he moved the baptism questions earlier in the book, in order to teach children that they are learning about God because he has already claimed them as his own. In the same manner, I recommend the Westminster Larger Catechism for adults; it ties baptism and the other means of grace to Christian living, not merely presenting them as doctrinal beliefs.[512] However, I would like the catechetical approach to incorporate narratives for growing children up in their baptism. Although the catechism is by nature propositional, its lessons can be contextualized in the story of God's relationship to his people. Since children are drawn in by story, pastors and parents should consider ways to embed the narrative of baptism into their home instruction, thus drawing them into the baptismal service itself.

Encouraging parents to live out their faith in front of their children was a second important goal of pre-baptismal formation brought up in the interviews. This highlights a unique aspect of the continuum of baptismal formation: perhaps the best way for parents to participate in their child's baptismal formation is to deepen and exhibit their own personal baptismal formation. Brett highlights this in the devotional he gives to parents. As they enter into the baptismal liturgy over the seven days leading up to the ceremony, the significance of their child's baptism has a shaping effect upon them as parents.

In the end, since practice and belief are "mutually causative,"[513] parental

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[512] "Its teaching on the effective use of the means of grace is particularly helpful in guarding us against mere ritualism in public worship, and guiding us toward a faithful and fruitful participation in the divine ordinances appointed for our spiritual nourishment and growth." Ross, "Improving the Means of Grace," 415.

[513] Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity*, 29.

instruction in and demonstration of faith go hand in hand. If parents do not live out their faith in front of their children, then any attempt at instruction may, and likely will, fall flat. Correspondingly, if parents neglect teaching their children about the faith into which they were baptized, then children will not understand why their parents live in faith. It is a high calling to live out the parental baptismal vow, and all parents will experience some degree of failure to teach or live out faith for their children. However, we are assured that the promises of baptism are based on God's grace and not on good parenting skills. Parents who endeavor to point their child to God, despite weak words and feeble deeds, are exhibiting God's grace to their child and remaining faithful to their vows.

Outsiders Looking in on Baptism

The pastors also spoke of people who have not been baptized but are exploring the Christian faith. What does baptismal formation look like for them? I believe that formation is possible for anyone who is encountering God's truth, even people like Pharaoh whose heart was hardened. So how does witnessing baptism shape these people?

Pastors have to consider what barriers prevent outsiders from understanding baptism and other practices. This requires the pastor to have a biblical and theological understanding of baptismal practice, as well as an awareness of the cultural conditioning regarding baptism in the surrounding community. According to Wenger, there is always a certain amount of catching up to do for outsiders. The pastor and congregation must decide how much catching up is acceptable in order to adequately address the layers of unbelief that outsiders bring, but while still staying true to their values and traditions. In her analysis of how Christian practices both engage and are reshaped in response to non-Christian practices, Tanner claims that it is necessary to find a middle ground: worship

should not be impenetrable to outsiders; nor should it be exclusively for non-believers. Moreover, there are benefits to identifying areas of unbelief about baptism, since these areas are likely shared by believers and non-believers alike.

One solution I propose is that pastors tell the story of baptism in ways that intersect the stories of outsiders. Phil, for example, speaks evangelistically to unbelievers in his baptism services; this also serves as evangelism training for his congregants. Jeff believes the baptism stories he tells are just as important for non-believers, since they intersect with their own stories and illustrate what the process of faith looks like as one moves toward baptism. Taking an evangelistic tone amidst the baptismal ceremony honors the Great Commission.

Steps Toward Baptismal Formation After Baptism

Even while they were discussing pre-baptismal formation, the interviewees brought up elements of post-baptismal formation, including teaching the faith to children and modeling evangelistic techniques for believers. I see ways that both the baptismal ceremony itself and the rest of corporate worship can be involved in baptismal formation. First, I will analyze how the formative nature of baptismal practice enhances the rest of corporate worship, and then I will look at the ways in which baptismal formation is fostered in the context of corporate worship. In his approach to practice, Anderson uses the dichotomy of manifestation (past), presentation (present), and emergence (future) to describe the ways in which practices shape and are shaped by communities. I think that this is a helpful starting place to consider the ways in which communities practice baptism, because it can pinpoint weaknesses or gaps in the practices of a community.

Practicing the Past

Often, a community's practice focuses solely on the past, re-enacting events like baptism and communion that have been significant in its formation. Part of this is unavoidable, since every practice has a previous experience as a frame of reference. The danger, however, is that the past can become a criterion for effectiveness, creating a golden-age mindset that acknowledges only its positive aspects and is blind to its negative aspects. For example, some communities want to perform baptisms in a certain way that upholds the ideals of a certain era, whether it be the early church, the Reformation, or their own childhood. This way of thinking fails to consider the ways in which baptism exists in the context of the present community, and does not account for the fact that baptisms have an ongoing shaping effect on the community.

I propose that it is better to consider the past as it is joined with the present, just like Jesus said at the Last Supper when he instituted the sacrament of communion: "Do this in remembrance of me." The theme of remembering baptism is woven throughout the New Testament letters. Paul used baptism to illustrate the entire conversion experience, and he exhorted his readers to look back at their baptism as shorthand for contemplating the tapestry of union with Christ. At the same time, Paul did not want them to stop at simply reflecting on baptism. Instead, he provoked them to action in the world on the basis of their baptism. Similarly, the pastor's role today is to make baptism relevant by showing how this past event points to present action and to future outcomes.

"Remembering" was a major theme in the interview discussions of post-baptismal formation, primarily in the context of the baptismal ceremony, and secondarily in the midst of pastoral care. When describing their baptismal ceremonies, every pastor said that

remembering baptism is the way the stories of the congregants join the present experience of the recipient. And many of the pastors point to baptism to assure their congregants of salvation and identity in Christ when providing pastoral care. Not coincidentally, these two contexts are the primary avenues for improving baptism described in WLC 167.

According to the interviewees, remembering their baptism is an invitation for adults to reflect on their personal story of faith and acknowledge God's continued faithfulness over the intervening years. The pastors take a different approach for childhood recipients of baptism, however. The memory of their actual baptism does not exist outside of a faded photograph or an oral recollection passed down by someone else, if either even exists. Instead, children remember by witnessing other children getting baptized and engrafting this image onto their own understanding and experience of baptism.

Some do view this as a disadvantage of infant baptism; they will never remember their baptism as vividly as someone baptized as a teenager or an adult. This was the struggle of one family I pastored at my church, who had come from a background of believers-only baptism. After attending our church for a time, they accepted our theology of infant baptism; however, they did not want to baptize their daughter because they did not want to deprive her of the memory of her own baptism. But as they continued to witness more children being baptized, they came to understand that the beauty of baptism lies in looking back and seeing that God had been pursuing us faithfully before we even knew it, children and adults alike. Once they accepted this, they baptized their daughter. Their story illustrates that practice and belief are interdependent for identity formation,

and shows the power of narrative and practice to shape identity.

Practicing the Present

The embodied practices of the church help define the congregation's present identity. The decisions that pastors make about how baptism and worship are practiced instill certain ideals and perspectives in the congregation. This dynamic is highlighted when a new attendee feels like an outsider because their current congregation does not look like their former congregation, even if it is in the same denomination.

According to the historical literature, the early church observed a variety of baptismal practices that made each community unique, both in responding to the needs of the surrounding culture and addressing the needs of the people within the church community. The DPW demonstrates the same concept, encouraging pastors to design their teaching and prayers to respond to the needs and beliefs of the community and culture.

This raises the interesting dynamic of denomination- vs. local-level practices, aptly illustrated in the PC(USA) controversy over baptismal liturgy. Critics of the BCW say it minimizes a distinctively Reformed covenant theology in favor of more ecumenical rites that emphasize the Great Commission and other pan-denominational baptismal themes. And although the denomination officially adopted the BCW in 1993, at the local level, many congregations have simply continued whatever practices they had observed previously. What is the value in publishing a denominational standard that exerts little to no authority at the congregational level? No matter how well a proposed reform embodies the meaning of baptism, there is no guarantee that congregations will accept it; traditions develop when people do things a certain way over a long enough period of

time, and it can seem unbearable to change direction just for the sake of denominational unity.

Practicing the Future

Recognizing the future nature of baptismal practice enables communities to connect its effects to ongoing identity formation. This character of practice was less apparent in the literature as compared to its past and present characteristics. However, the concept of improving baptism found in WLC 167 includes both the present aspect of witnessing baptisms in the congregation and with the future interaction between baptism and Christian living. Perhaps the most obvious result of baptism is its connection with believers uniting with Christ in his resurrection, as this is the future trajectory of all those who place their hope and trust in Christ.

Mark's practice of introducing the child to the community after baptism is a beautiful example of engaging with the future impact of baptism. As he walks the child around, he invites the congregation to imagine the roles they will play in the child's life and how they will be called on to remind this child of this day. This is an aspect of post-baptismal formation that will take place in the life of the child, as well as the formation that takes place in parents and the congregation as they participate in the child's spiritual development. Post-baptismal formation is also alluded to in infant baptism, which invokes the hope and expectation that the child will someday respond to God's promises in baptism and profess faith on their own.

Corporate Worship

In each interview, I made a point of asking about corporate worship practices in order to see how the pastors articulate the meaning of baptism outside of the ceremony

itself. The interviewees sketched out explicit and implicit ways they illustrate baptism for their congregants, but the response that resonated with me the most was revealing baptism in the shape of the liturgy. It begins with praising God for the many ways in which he is worthy to be honored; moves to explaining our need to confess sins and receive forgiveness; follows up with the assurance of the good news that those who have faith in Christ are forgiven; progresses to a message from God's Word that speaks to unbelief and proclaims the good news of the Kingdom; and concludes with a charge to live out this good news and a blessing promising that God goes with us.

As I write this, it amazes me that this description shares the contours of WLC 167, which asks about improving baptism. Baptism is a summons to worship, a reason to give praise and thanksgiving, a motivation for confessing sin, a source of assurance of our identity in Christ, a strengthening of the message of Christ's death and resurrection, and a launch into the Christian life in the world. In the end, baptism corresponds to the form and the content of worship, so engaging in corporate worship can be seen as a practice aimed at improving baptism. There is a danger of replacing God with baptism as the proper subject of worship, so perhaps I should qualify what I mean. By perceiving how baptism mirrors our practice of worship, we see how God's character and mission are expressed tangibly in connection with baptism and throughout the practice of corporate worship. This is true whether or not a specific service includes a baptism. Miksoki takes a similar approach in connecting baptism with pedagogy and understanding the Trinity.[514]

[514] Mikoski, 67.

Effects of Baptismal Formation

This study has analyzed the past and present aspects of baptismal formation; we now look at its future effects. Baptismal formation is defined as spiritual formation specifically connected to baptismal theology and practice. The literature and interview data have convinced me that the baptismal formation results in Christian maturity. This maturity is practiced by people endeavoring to follow Christ by improving their baptism. Improving baptism is the human response to God's gracious actions that are signified and sealed in baptism. I believe that the composers of this catechism question have wisely laid out the nuances of spiritual formation as it is embodied by Christian identity related to baptism.

The Practice of Improving Baptism

In the end, what does it look like to improve baptism? As an embodied practice, improving baptism embeds the baptismal narrative, and in turn shapes the identity of the recipient. Baptism is part of the story of every Christian throughout all time. Each person's experience of baptism, whether positive or negative, shapes and informs their spiritual identity. As they continue to participate in the baptism of others, they will grow in their understanding of baptism generally and in their understanding of their own baptism personally. Baptism tells the story of God's gracious action to impart a new relationship and identity in Christ, and the story continues to be told in the midst of the community where God is shaping individuals and communities in Christian identity.

Improving baptism looks like engaging in a broad range of Christian practices as a response to baptism. This is part of what Christian maturity looks like. Despite the fact that Dykstra and Bass consciously omit baptism from their list of twelve practices, they

still view baptism as the "liturgical summation of all Christian practices."[515] Therefore, participation in these individual practices is both a response to the process of baptismal formation and a growing into different facets of baptismal identity.

Improving baptism is an important concept because even though the ceremony takes place at one discrete moment, the effects of baptism are cultivated throughout the Christian life. Baptism exists on a continuum rather than a momentary stop; it is a flowing river of living water instead of a still pond.

Improving Baptism in Community

The community component is key to baptismal formation and improving baptism. Formation takes place in the midst of community. This is why baptism is performed publicly in worship rather than privately in the home: the recipient benefits from being received into the community of God's people, and the community benefits from being present at each baptism. When the community vows to play a part in this individual's spiritual formation, the practice of improving baptism is given a team and a playing field. The members of the church are teammates, encouraging and reminding each other of the gospel in the midst of struggles and temptations. They provide shared wisdom and experience in Christian living. The church also provides the playing field on which the effects of baptismal formation are demonstrated—for example, dealing productively with conflict is one of the signs of Christian maturity. Ultimately, the story of baptism begins with God's overarching story. Then, it is spoken into and through the life of the individual living amidst the plot lines of the rest of God's people, and it reaches the final chapter as the body of Christ is united in the consummation of Christ's return.

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[515] Dykstra and Bass, 30-31.

Recommendations for Practice

This study focused on the relationship between baptismal practice and spiritual formation. In light of the findings described above, the church is well advised to consider the following recommendations to shape its practices.

First, pastors need to understand how their approach to baptismal practice impacts their congregation's understanding of baptism. This includes but is not exclusive to the practice of pedagogy. Reformed baptism and worship services tend to be heavy on teaching, and while this might be a valid critique, Reformed pastors can use this part of the tradition to their advantage. Similar to Calvin's approach to ecclesial pedagogy, baptismal teaching can ground a congregation in remembering their baptism. However, pastors should also consider how practice and narrative interact to form identity, and seek out those practices that, in conjunction with teaching, will shape their congregants.

Second, pastors need to find ways to help their congregation participate in baptisms. Pastors already do the crucial work of preparing candidates for baptism, but since the congregation plays a vital role in the spiritual nurture and ongoing journey of the recipient, they also should be taught how to participate in baptism. This tends to take the form of a simple description or a defense of what is happening in baptism, but it would change things if pastors would address the question of "so what" to the congregation and not just to the candidate. I am not suggesting reducing the address to the candidate, but rather bringing the congregation's story to bear upon the ceremony in addition to God's and the candidate's stories.

Third, pastors and worship planners should consider how baptismal understanding is integrated throughout the worship service. This could impact all worship services, not

just Baptism Sundays. Baptism touches on each area of the worship service to some degree, even the form of the liturgy as a whole. As baptism is a key component of Christian identity, spiritual formation would be strengthened by explicitly making the connection between elements of worship and baptismal themes. I think that congregations will also benefit from pastors holding the mindset that corporate worship forms Christian identity; addressing this outwardly will deepen and strengthen congregational participation in worship.

Fourth, it is important for pastors to understand the ongoing impact of baptism and communicate this to their congregants. WLC 167 provides practical suggestions on how to improve baptism. Since baptism is the identity marker for every Christian, it should be natural for baptism to saturate congregants' experience of Christian identity. Whether dealing with issues of assurance, unity, or temptation, the pastor's role is to point people to their baptismal identity in Christ as the truest thing about themselves, and not other identities of failure or success that are vying for their attention. The story of baptism must be the most audible amidst the many stories that are playing out in their hearts and minds.

Fifth, congregants would benefit from making sense of and finding strength from their own baptismal narratives. This means revisiting and reflecting on the role baptism played in their becoming part of God's story, what this new identity has done to rewrite their stories, the impact the congregation has played in shaping their identities, and the ongoing impact baptism has in their spiritual journeys. This can be accomplished simply by actively remembering baptism during a baptism ceremony, or by attending retreats or workshops on the story of baptism. Sharing personal stories of baptism with their group

of fellow believers deepens the community identity.

Sixth, parents must consider how they carry out their baptismal vows in the spiritual nurture of their children. The greatest spiritual influence that you will have on your children is how you live out your faith in front of them. Employ whatever means of teaching or catechism you wish, but also be ready to allow whatever you are teaching your children to transform you. If you are teaching them about forgiveness, be the first to seek and model forgiveness. It is also important that pastors equip and encourage parents and even their congregants in how to nurture these covenant children. Pastors need to model what it means to remember baptism for the children in their congregation.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on the relationship between baptismal practice and spiritual formation. As with any study, this study had some limitations. Therefore, further research into the following areas would be highly valuable for the church.

First, I would have liked to plunge more deeply into equipping parents to train and raise their baptized children into understanding baptismal promises. As a parent of baptized children, I would love to have a resource for improving baptism for children, and as a pastor, I would appreciate knowing how other pastors have equipped the parents of their congregation in this way. A few of the interviews scratched the surface of this subject, so I am certain that research devoted specifically to this topic would yield varied and vivid results.

Second, I would be interested in asking people who were baptized as children how this has impacted their spiritual formation into adulthood. What were the significant practices or teachings on baptism that have shaped their approach to remembering their

baptism? Was there an event that stood out as transformative and identity-giving like adult baptism is? This would draw upon not just parenting but also the congregational nurture that these children received.

Third, I am interested in knowing how other pastors deal with mixed views on baptism in their congregation, including differences over who can receive baptism, or how baptism is administered. What barriers do these differences present to their members in understanding the unity that baptism is meant to create? What challenges for shepherding and leadership have arisen from this heterogeneity? How do pastors choose to address these differences, both in public forums and in private interactions?

Fourth, although I touched on the theme of church membership, there was no room for deep analysis due to the limitations of the interviews. To expand on this topic, I suggest diving into the question about baptism and membership requirements. What is the impact of requiring church membership for baptism, versus not having this stipulation? Are there long-term effects on spiritual and identity formation produced by these different practices? I would like to know what factors influenced people to choose one over the other, as well as what role church discipline does or does not play in their spiritual formation. In fact, church discipline and baptism could be its own subject altogether.

Fifth, what role does seminary education play in instilling the denomination's worship standards? Once pastors begin serving their local congregations, they will begin to shape their baptism practices in response to the community. This phenomenon was illustrated by the variety of practices described in the interviews. But are pastors adequately equipped to understand how baptism and other worship practices shape

individual and congregational identity?

Finally, I believe that this study's approach to the practice of baptism can be applied to the rest of corporate worship. My original research proposal was to look at corporate worship and spiritual formation, but this was quickly deemed too large of a subject for the length and scope of this study. Narrowing the scope to baptism still proved to be a large undertaking, and I believe focusing on a single element of baptism would produce a rich description of pastoral and congregational practice. I suggest narrowing down a future study not only by worship practice but also to a specific effect of spiritual formation, which would still allow for an abundant yet manageable research study. Here are a few suggestions: How does the practice of corporate confession of sin shape congregants' understanding of justification? How does regularly reciting creeds and confessions in corporate worship benefit the making of new disciples? How does weekly versus monthly participation in the Lord's Supper form a Christian approach to hospitality? There are countless ways to uncover the stories that are being written on the journey of following and serving Christ.

Appendix A

The Westminster Larger Catechism on Baptism

Q. 165. What is baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself, of remission of sins by his blood, and regeneration by his Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.

Q. 166. Unto whom is baptism to be administered?

A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.

Q. 167. How is our baptism to be improved by us?

A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

Appendix B

Collected Baptismal Prayers

Ambrose's Milanese post-baptismal anointing prayer

God the Father Almighty . . . who has brought you to a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit and has forgiven your sins, himself anoints you into eternal life.[516]

Martin Luther's Sindflutgebet, or Flood prayer

Almighty and eternal God, who hast through the flood, according to thy righteous judgment, condemned the unfaithful world, and, according to thy great mercy, hast saved faithful Noah, even eight persons, and hast drowned hard-hearted Pharaoh with all his in the Red Sea, and hast led thy people Israel dry through it, thereby prefiguring this bath of thy holy baptism, and through the baptism of thy dear child, our Lord Jesus Christ, hast sanctified and set apart the Jordan and all water for a saving flood, and an ample washing away of sins: we pray that through thy same infinite mercy thou wilt graciously look upon this N., and bless him with a right faith in the spirit, so that through this saving flood all that was born in him from Adam and all which he himself added thereto may be drowned and submerged: and that he may be separated from the unfaithful, and preserved in the holy ark of Christendom dry and safe, and ever fervent in spirit and joyful in hope serve thy name, so that he with all the faithful may be worthy to inherit thy promise of eternal life, through Christ our Lord. Amen.[517]

Ulrich Zwingli's revised baptismal prayer

O almighty and eternal God, who through the flood didst by thy mighty judgment condemn the unbelieving world and thyself deliver of thy great mercy faithful Noah: who didst drown obdurate Pharaoh with all his host in the Red Sea, and didst bring thy people Israel through the same dry-shod, figuring thereby this bath of baptism: We pray thee, of thine unmerited mercy, that thou wouldest graciously look upon this thy servant, N., and kindle the light of faith in his heart whereby he may be incorporate into thy Son, and with him be buried in death and raised again to newness of life; that so, following him daily, he may joyfully bear his cross, and hold fast to his with true faith, firm hope and fervent charity: and that for thy sake he may so manfully quit this life, which is naught else but death, that at the last day he may appear with boldness at the general judgment of thy Son. Grant this through the same thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, one God. Amen.[518]

John Calvin's invocation prayer

Lord God, Eternal and Almighty Father, who by your infinite mercy and good pleasure have promised to be not only our God but the God of our children as well, be

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[516] From *De Sacramentis*, ca. 391. Whitaker and Johnson, 179.

[517] From first *Taufbüchlein*, 1523. Fisher, 11.

[518] From Zurich revision entitled, "Now follows the form of baptism which is now used in Zurich, and all the additions, which have no foundation in the word of God, have been removed." 1525. Ibid., 130-131.

pleased then, we pray you, to confirm that grace to this child before us, being born of a mother and father whom you have called into your Church; and as he is presented to you and set apart by us, grant that he be received into your holy protection, declaring yourself to be his God and Savior, remitting in him that original sin of which the whole lineage of Adam is guilty, then sanctifying him by your Spirit to the end that when reaching the age of understanding, he might know and worship you as his only God, glorifying you in all his life, that always he receive from you the remission of his sins. And that he might receive from you all such graces, be pleased to incorporate him into the communion of our Lord Jesus that he share all his goods as one of the members of his body. Hear us, Father of mercy, to the end that the baptism which we administer according to your command might produce its fruit and its virtue as it is declared to us by the Gospel: Our Father . . .[519]

Westminster Directory of Public Worship

Prayer before baptism

This [exhortation to the parent] being done, prayer is also to be joined with the word of institution, for sanctifying the water to this spiritual use; and the minister is to pray to this or the like effect:

"That the Lord, who hath not left us as strangers without the covenant of promise, but called us to the privileges of his ordinances, would graciously vouchsafe to sanctify and bless his own ordinance of baptism at this time: That he would join the inward baptism of his Spirit with the outward baptism of water; make this baptism to the infant a seal of adoption, remission of sin, regeneration, and eternal life, and all other promises of the covenant of grace: That the child may be planted into the likeness of the death and resurrection of Christ; and that, the body of sin being destroyed in him, he may serve God in newness of life all his days." . . .

Prayer after baptism

[After the baptism, the minister] is to give thanks and pray, to this or the like purpose:

"Acknowledging with all thankfulness, that the Lord is true and faithful in keeping covenant and mercy: That he is good and gracious, not only in that he numbereth us among his saints, but is pleased also to bestow upon our children this singular token and badge of his love in Christ: That, in his truth and special providence, he daily bringeth some into the bosom of his church, to be partakers of his inestimable benefits, purchased by the blood of his dear Son, for the continuance and increase of his church.

And praying, That the Lord would still continue, and daily confirm more and more this his unspeakable favour: That he would receive the infant now baptized, and solemnly entered into the household of faith, into his fatherly tuition and defence, and remember him with the favour that he sheweth to his people; that, if he shall be taken out of this life in his infancy, the Lord, who is rich in mercy, would be pleased to receive him up into glory; and if he live, and attain the years of discretion, that the Lord would so teach him by his word and Spirit, and make his baptism effectual to him, and so uphold him by his divine power and grace, that by faith he may prevail against the devil, the

[519] From *Genevan Psalter*, 1542. Quoted in Old, 240.

world, and the flesh, till in the end he obtain a full and final victory, and so be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord."[520]

French Reformed baptismal liturgy

For you, little child, Jesus Christ has come, he has fought, he has suffered. For you he entered the shadow of Gethsemane and the horror of Calvary. For you he uttered the cry, "It is finished!" For you he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and there he intercedes—for you, little child, even though you do not know it. But in this way the word of the Gospel becomes true. "We love him, because he first loved us."[521]

[520] Dickson, 383-384.

[521] Quoted in James Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 76.

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