

# The Sacrament of Baptism

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## 1. Historical Remarks:

1.1 In the Bible water has following meanings.

- Life: (e.g. the rivers of Garden of Eden in Genesis 2, the saving of the Israelites in Exodus 14).
- Death: (e.g. the flood in Genesis 7, destruction of the Egyptians in Exodus 14),
- Cleansing: (e.g. John's baptism was seen by Mathew 3:6 as to clean Jewish from sin, in Ezekiel prophecy 36:24 it is written "God shall sprinkler clean water upon His people),
- Reviving: Water also is seen by Isaiah 44:3 as a symbol of reviving (God will pour water on a land that was once dry).

1.2 What distinguish between water as being source of death and being source of life, is the spirit (Ruh=Wind). Therefore the Spirit-Water combination brings life and/or death. Wind that does not bring water leads to dryness (death). On the other hand wind that brings water leads to rain (life). However, wind and water became a general symbol of life giving or death dealing. But a notion was developed into the concept of life giving spirit of God.

1.3 According to the prophecy of Ezekiel, the renaissance of the Jews would begin with the new "Messianic Age" (Ezekiel 36:24-28). Therefore John the Baptizer appeared in the river of Jordan and led Jewish people to cross the river to enter a new age under a "New Covenant". In other words, John's baptism was not for the forgiveness of sins exclusively, but rather to guide people to the new age. And that explains why our Lord Jesus Christ insisted to be baptized!

## 2. Baptism of the Lord:

The baptism of our Lord was a sign for His death and resurrection. By going down into water of river of Jordan, He was symbolically going down into the grave (dying). By raising from water of river of Jordan, He was symbolically raising from the death (the resurrection), while the ascending of the Holy Spirit upon Him symbolizes the authorization given by the Father to the Son to bring freedom to the slavery. However, this symbolic death, resurrection and ascending of Holy Spirit is

going to be real. Therefore He said in Luke 12:50 “there is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished”. Eventually, our baptism too is a death and rebirth process, die in the water to evil and rebirth (rise) with Jesus Christ and be anointed by the Holy Spirit. (see Rom. 6:3). Our Lord Jesus Christ through His conversation with Nicodemus, stipulates birth from water and spirit to enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:5), hence baptism is the threshold of the Kingdom of God!

### **3. The early Christian Practice:**

In the light of what is mentioned before, the initial role of baptism was to be part of what was known as “Christian initiation”, and begin Christian life to develop and fulfill the faith. However, “Christian initiation” was divided at a later time to Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. The disciples of the Lord along with very first Christian were directly baptized in the spirit alone and that was an exception since they were baptized by the whole Christ event itself., through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: ). Notice here that “outpouring” is an expression of water coverings! Hence the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a baptism of water too (internally). In Acts 2:38 St. Peter is urging people to reform and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins in order to receive the gift of Holy Spirit. And that is the first introduction to baptism, no catechism, no instruction and no long preparation.

### **4. Evolution of Baptism forms:**

#### 4.1 The Apostles Era

- ◆ Immersion in water
- ◆ Baptizing in the name of Jesus (Acts 19:2-6)
- ◆ Baptizing using Trinitarian formula
- ◆ Baptizing using “the faith conversion questions” with immersing in water

#### 4.2 After the Apostles:

- ◆ Candidate prays and fasts
- ◆ Church community prays and fasts
- ◆ Immersing in water
- ◆ Trinitarian questions celebration of the Eucharist
- ◆ Outstretching of hands (outpouring the Holy Spirit) for the forgiveness of sins

#### 4.3 Second century to the fourth century:

- ◆ Introducing the catechumenate: preparation into Christianity
- ◆ Baptism in the illegal, persecuted and underground Church was considered as a final commitment with the full expectation of martyrdom and everlasting life in heaven.

#### 4.4 What is catechumenate?

It is a long probational process by which a candidate for Christianity practices and grows into the virtue which would make one worthy and prepared for new life in Christ. The catechumenate was a long training period of instruction, prayer, fasting and conversion. It was a time for learning how to live a Christian life, a spiritual internship. Someone must sponsor each candidate from the Christian community. The spiritual preparation for catechumenate was three years.

#### 4.5 After the "Peace of Constantine"

In the fourth century the Church became legal. This new transition was reflected in the theology of the Fathers in which they shifted the emphasis of baptism from being only final forgiveness of sins and a preparation for heaven to being a sacrament that confirms to the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Consequently all the baptized are pulled into Jesus' saving action and are redeemed. Hence the transition in the theology of Baptism is no longer final act of the remission of sins and the passage into heaven, but rather baptism is the beginning of the life in Christ in this world.

### 5. **Catechism of the Catholic Church in the light of the Second Vatican Council:**

Sacraments of the Church are called also sacraments of the faith, Sacraments being means of grace are not man's invention but rather are God's given grace to save mankind and they are conclusion according to scripture and Church's tradition. Although sacraments practiced by the Church are seven (as a sign of completeness), all basic grace filled actions are sacraments as well (e.g. Jesus Christ: the Primordial Sacrament in His humanity, Virginity of Mary is sacramental according to St Ignatius, the Church is the Sacrament as a sign of God's presence).

#### 5.1 In general the seven Sacraments instituted by Christ and developed by Catholic Church are:

##### 5.1.3 Sacraments of Christian Initiation

- ◆ Baptism
- ◆ Confirmation

- ◆ Eucharist (the Sacrament of Sacraments)

#### 5.1.3 Sacraments of Healing

- ◆ Penance & Reconciliation
- ◆ Anointing of the Sick

#### 5.1.3 Sacraments of the Mission of the Faithful

- ◆ Holy Order
- ◆ Matrimony

#### 5.2 (CCC1214-1216).

Baptism = immerse in the water to symbolize the baptized burial into Christ death and become new creature (2Cor.5: 17). Baptism is a renewal by the Holy Spirit and a birth from water and spirit to be eligible to enter Kingdom of God (John 3:5). Baptism is enlightenment, for the baptized person becomes “son of light” (Eph. 5:8,14)

#### 5.3 CCC 1224:

**“The spirit who had hovered over the water of the first creation descended then on the Christ as a prelude (introduction) of the new creation and the Father revealed that Jesus is His “Beloved Son”**

Jesus Christ is the new Adam who will conquer sin after taking His mission and brings salvation to the human being and deliver humanity from death at the old Adam brought. Christ also, invited all of us to be baptized in His death on the cross. The blood and water that flowed from our Lord’s side are types of Baptism and Eucharist, the Sacraments of the new life.

#### 5.4 The Grace of Baptisms:

- Forgiveness of sins: original sin, personal sin and punishment
- New creation: “whoever is in Christ is new a new creation” (2 Cor.5: 17)
- Incorporated into the Church, the body of Christ “for in one spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1Cor.12: 13). In Church’s community, baptism is source of responsibility and duties, the baptized person also enjoys rights within the Church (e.g. receive sacraments, be nourished with Word of God...etc)
- The sacramental bond of the unity of Christian: all who are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ are accepted as brothers and sisters by the children of the Catholic Church (CCC 1271)
- An indelible spiritual mark: not even sin can remove the mark of baptism.

