

Baptism: Archeological, Historical, Biblical
F.M. Buhler
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The outline points correspond directly to the chapter and paragraph headings.

FIRST SECTION
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL ASPECTS

I. The Period of the Primitive Church (p. 9)

A. The Sources

The New Testament and the wealth of MSS evidence: "More than 200 uncial manuscripts . . . and about 6,000 cursive (lower case) . . ."

B. The Character of Biblical Christianity

The evolution (negative) of theology and baptism.

C. Religion of Salvation

The central nature of Christianity is salvation / the new birth.

D. Non-Hereditary Religion

True Christianity is individual. One doesn't become a Christian by birth.

E. Significance of Baptism

Not a meritorious act. One with the baptism of the Spirit in that neither can be divorced from the other (or should be).

"The practice of certain churches today that have introduced a waiting period more or less long between conversion and water baptism by be a measure of wisdom, but it is entirely foreign to the New Testament." [12]

Cf. Acts 8:30; 16:33. [I would add that the waiting period goes back to the second century catechumens]

F. Simplicity and Spontaneity of Baptism

There are no archeological remains of baptistries dating to the first century. Baptisms took place in rivers, ponds, lakes, etc. There are no indications of any procedure for preparing for baptism or baptismal ceremonies.

Apostles baptized, but so did other church leaders, perhaps even deacons (cf. Philip in Acts 8:12,13,28).

II. The Period of the First Innovations: Second and Third Centuries (p. 14)

A. Sprinkling

From the early 2nd c. baptism was beginning to be accepted by other means other than immersion. The Didache (120 AD) has this:

"Concerning baptism, baptize in this way. Having first rehearsed all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, in living water. But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and, if thou canst not in cold, in warm. If you have neither, pour water thrice on the head in the name, of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Before the baptism let the baptizer and the baptized fast, and others if they can. And order the baptized to fast one or two days before."

"Affusion will not be generally practiced until after the paleo-christian period.

B. The Sacrament

Evolution from an ordinance whereby the symbol and the thing signified are distinct to an identity and even an equation of them (i.e. baptism and the new birth). Cf. Justin of Rome (1 Apology, 61 & 65; Hermas, Similitudes IX, 16-17. Irenaeus, Against Heresies III, 17:2.

Tertullian insists on the role of faith and yet uses language that sounds like baptismal regeneration (On Baptism, IV, 4; VI 1; XVIII, 5. 50 years later, Cyprian recommends the baptism of infants (Letters to Bishop Fidus).

As baptism evolves into a sacrament, the pastorate evolves into the priesthood! The sacrament needs an office with supernatural power.

C. The House of the Christians in Doura Europos

Archeological discovery in 1932 at Doura Europos, a Roman city bordering Syria, on the bank of the Euphrates. A house used in the 3rd c. as a Christian meeting place/church was discovered. We see that by this time Christians had simple places of worship. The house had a separate baptistry from that of

the meeting house. The baptistry was large enough for the full immersion of an adult. This is the oldest extant baptistry.

III. The Period of the Radical Transformation of Christianity: The Fourth Century (p. 18)

A. Christianity becomes a Lawful Religion

Christians were persecuted by Diocletian. Galerius signed an edict of toleration in 311. The edict declared that:

"Christians are to pray to their God for our salvation, that of the empire and their own, in order that the integrity of the State be re-established everywhere, and that they will be able to live a peaceful life in their homes."

Christianity become lawful.

B. Christianity becomes the Official Religion of the Empire

From Constantine on (with the short exception of Julian the Apostate) the favor of the Empire with Christianity increases. Theodosius prohibits paganism in Rome in Alexandria in 391, t/o the entire empire the next year.

"All the subjects, young or old, were introduced into the church by baptism, generally without previous conversion and without personal conviction. From then on, the nature of Christianity is fundamentally flawed. It became a hereditary, sacramental religion . . ." [19]

C. Appearances of Basilicas and Baptistries

With the acceptance of the faith by the authorities basilicas increase in large numbers. Buildings with separate baptistries. Separate buildings (from the area of the worship gathering) signifies that baptism was considered to be essential for entrance into the church. The baptistries of the earlier period were large enough to immerse an adult. By the 5th or 6th c. they were reduced in size to half a meter or so deep. Triple immersion was conferred on adults following a period of instruction (sev. weeks).

"The meaning of baptism, having already evolved from symbol to sacrament in the second and third centuries, further evolved from a rite to blot out all sin at the beginning of the fourth century (from whence the delayed baptisms of a certain number of known persons, among them Gregory of Nazianze, Basil the Great, Chrysostom, Jerome, even the emperor Constantine), towards a sacrament to blot out original sin, especially after the formulation of the doctrine by Augustine (from whence precocious baptisms of newborn babes practised in the Middle Ages until this day)." [21]

Seems that the first perversion of baptism was that it was required to blot out all sin. So people would delay their baptism until their deathbed. After Augustine, that changed with the wholesale baptism of infants.

"Mgr. Duchesne said that in the fourth century one went 'from the baptistry to the grave.' After Augustine to the contrary, one could say that one went from the cradle to the baptistry, nevertheless not in an absolute manner, for the baptism of children was not generalized by the seventh or eighth centuries in certain regions." [21-22]

IV. The Period When The Changes Are Defined and Consolidated: Beginning in the Fifth Century (p. 23)

Charlemagne decreed in the ordinance of the Saxons in 785 the death penalty for all violations of "Christian principles" including refusing to be baptized or refusing to baptize one's children. Several thousand Saxons were killed for violating this edict. Baptism was still generally practiced by immersion, or triple immersion.

Progressively, pools are replaced by baptismal fonts.

A. Codification of the Changes

For the RC Church, the Council of Trent codified that which was vague and evolving. Baptism is rendered essential for salvation.

B. In the Twentieth Century

There is an inclination to return to the primitive model. Churches adopting the "Ambrosian rite" of immersing infants. The Orthodox Church still practices the immersion of infants. However, there is still no emphasis on the recipient's faith and conversion.

C. The Episcopal Problem

D. The Testimony of Iconography

"Christian iconography permits us equally to follow the stages of the evolution of baptismal liturgy.

Up until the twelfth century approximately, in the numerous representations of His baptism, Christ is in the water up to his hips, or up to the waist, or even up to the neck (fig. 14). It can only refer to baptism by total or almost total immersion. John the Baptist stretches out his right hand towards Christ's head and holds in his left hand a roll or codex.

From the thirteenth century, Christ is represented with water to the knees, up to half-calf, or even only up to the ankles. John is then represented pouring water on the head of Jesus often by means of a scallop shell (fig. 15)." [27]

E. The Mode of Baptism

F. The Baptism of Children

Baptismal pools began to disappear by the 5th - 7th c. indicating that the immersion of adults was being abandoned.

Tertullian was opposed to the baptism of little children whereas Cyprian, by the middle of the 3rd c. was a defender of the baptism of small children and infants. Origin of this seems to be in N. Africa.

G. The Significance of Baptism

"When the spiritual experience was no longer required as a condition for baptism, especially from the fourth century when all the subjects of the empire, without distinction, were introduced into the church, baptism was supposed to accomplish that which it previously symbolized, and one attributed to baptism the virtue of blotting out sins. more particularly, original sin.

By reason of the evolution of theology, one thus came to baptismal regeneration, still in practice today in the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformers of the sixteenth century, while rejecting baptismal regeneration and in proclaiming salvation by grace, through faith, nevertheless, maintained the baptism of little children as a sign of the covenant of grace by replacing circumcision, sign of the old covenant." [29-30]

H. All is Linked Together

Archeology shows the link between the evolution of dogma and the practice of baptism. Baptismal pools reduced in size, the sacrament replacing the symbol, the unconscious infant replacing the repentant believer.

FIRST SECTION
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL ASPECTS

I. General Observations (35)

- A. In the Holy Scriptures we have Innumerable Exhortations to Return to God and His Law
- B. Christ and His Apostles Bequeathed to us a Perfect Christianity
- C. The Scriptures themselves Underscore the Necessity to Stay True to the Gospel as it was Proclaimed in the Beginning
- D. In Seeing with Surprise and Sorrow the Rapid Abandonment of the Gospel by the Galatians (Gal. 1:6), Paul Affirms the Necessity to Refuse All Gospels Other than That Which They Had Received from Him
- E. John Writes at the End of the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" That Curses Attend Those Who Permit Themselves to Add Anything to His Book or Who Would Take Away Anything
- F. According to the Scripture, it is not by birth that one becomes a Christian, but by the New Birth

II. The Characteristics of Scriptural Baptism (39)

- A. Baptism is First of all an Act of Obedience to Christ
- B. Biblical Baptism is also the Visible Sign of an Invisible Spiritual Reality

As to Acts chapter 8, Philip was not a priest therefore the act of baptism was not sacramental. The priesthood didn't occur before the end of the second century in conjunction with the sacramental view of the ordinances.

- C. Baptism is a Testimony and a Commitment
- D. Baptism is an Enrolment

PICTURES OF THE VARIOUS BAPTISTRIES REPRESENTED IN ARCHEOLOGY FOLLOW.

The evolution/reduction of the baptistry is evident in many of these pictures.

APPENDICES

I. Appendix One

"The sudden important religious reversal: from the persecution to the recognition of Christianity by the Roman emperors of the fourth century." [67]

Chart and timeline follow . . .

Some key dates/events:

April 30th, 311 - Edict of Toleration of Galerius. He was very ill and asked for the Christians to pray for him, his salvation and that of the entire empire. Christianity is forbidden, but tolerated. Galerius dies in May of 311.

312 - Edict of Toleration by Constantine. Liberty is given to Christians and pagans.

337 - Constantine is baptized on his deathbed by the Arian archbishop Eusebius of Nicomedia.

361 - Julian the Apostate restores the pagan worship of Mithra.

390 - Bishop Ambrose constrains Theodosius to a public humiliation for the latter's part in the massacre of 7000 Thessalonians. For the first time an emperor submits to ecclesiastical authority.

391 - Theodosius prohibits pagan worship in Rome and Alexandria.

392 - Theodosius prohibits pagan worship throughout the entire empire. Christianity = State Religion.

II. Appendix Two

Excellent graphic showing the evolution of baptism and baptistries from large pools in the ground, to smaller pools in the ground, to raised pools on the ground, to baptismal fonts on pedestals.

III. Appendix Three

Graphic showing different modes of baptism. The Didache allows for pouring if immersion isn't possible.

IV. Appendix Four

Chart showing the evolution of baptism through the centuries.

V. Appendix Five

Summary of the work of Dr. J. Volanakis, "The Paleo-Christian Baptistries of Greece."

On pages 75-77, Buhler gives a summary-conclusion of Volanakis' work as follows:

1. During the first two centuries Christian baptism was practised in "living water"; that is to say, water from springs, rivers, lakes or the sea. Already, during the first half of the 3rd century, independent rooms are certified as baptisteries. Beginning at the second half of the 4th century, we find, in Greece, baptisteries built beside basilicas. Meanwhile, the most part were built in the 5th and 6th centuries.
2. In general the baptistery is composed of two parts: an anteroom in which the first part of the baptism took place, and beside it, a main part in which the baptismal pool is located and in which the second part of the baptism was accomplished. Sometimes a third part is found called "consignatorium" and further, more rarely a fourth part called "catechumenum."
3. As to its location in relation to the church, the baptistery is generally located in proximity to the narthex, for it was reserved for the non baptized.
4. The plans of the Greek baptisteries show different types of construction. They are buildings of three naves, rectangular constructions, square, tetrahedral, cruciform or octagonal. Stones and ordinary mortar generally constitute the building materials. They are covered with a wooden ceiling or a cupola.
5. The baptismal pools are most often made of brick with waterproof mortar with marble facing. In general, they are found in the center of the main room in order to facilitate the movement of the neophytes around the pool. A few monolithic baptismal pools are dated in the 6th century and constitute a preparatory transition to the baptismal fonts of the Middle Ages.
6. The baptismal pools have different shapes: they are cruciform, round, square, octagonal and hexagonal. The baptismal fonts are cylindrical or cruciform.
7. In the beginning the practice of baptism was very simple. Little by little, it takes on a more elaborate liturgy. Different liturgical types come into being. In Greece, baptism was administered in the Byzantium mode. The baptism was always linked to the liturgy of the first communion of the neophytes.
8. Confirmation followed immediately upon baptism for which they used the "chrismarium" or "consignatorium." Ablution soon followed.
9. Baptism was administered by a triple submersion and immersion, which is evident by the depth, width and general shape of the baptismal pool. Liturgical texts and others further certify this

practice. Both adult and infant baptism were practised. Since the end of the 6th or the beginning of the 7th century, infant baptism is predominant. For this reason, the baptistery as a separate room is eliminated and replaced by baptismal fonts.

10. During the first three centuries in Greece Christianity did not develop very much. Since the 4th and especially since the 5th and 6th centuries nearly all the inhabitants of Greece were baptized and incorporated into Christianity.

11. The resemblances that one can observe between the Greek baptisteries and those of Eastern countries (Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine) can be explained by the ecclesiastical, political and cultural relations existing among these countries. The common aspects among the baptistries of the paleo-christian Christianity demonstrate a relative unity in paleo-christian art in spite of the particularities which may be explained by local traditions.

12. The greater part of Greek baptisteries were destroyed by the Barbaric Invasions of the 7th and 8th centuries as well as by earthquakes, fires, etc. The baptisteries of the Dodecanese are the best preserved, but a goodly number of baptistries are still waiting to be the object of archaeological research.

VI. Appendix Six

From biblical church to modern apostasy.

- **Materialization** → from symbol to sacrament
- **Clericalization** → from the initial brotherhood to organized hierarchy
- **Defining of doctrine** → from divine revelation to human inventions
- **Universalism** → from the biblical church (ecclesia) to the unregenerate church
- **Localization** → of worship in spirit and truth to manifestations localized in space and time
- **Humanization** → from the condescension of God to the exaltation of man
- **Paganization** → from primitive Christianity to a pagan-Christian system

VII. Appendix Seven

A description of a baptismal ceremony by Cyril of Jerusalem about 350 AD

""As soon as you enter the interior of the building (the baptistery) you take off your tunic, signifying the casting off of the old man and his practices. Stripped, you are naked, thus imitating in that also the Christ, naked on the cross, which, by his nakedness cast off the principalities and powers and boldly dragged on the wood in his triumphant cortege. Once stripped, you are anointed with exorcised oil, from the top of the hair of the head to the feet. You thus become a participant of the true olive tree, Jesus Christ. Detached indeed from the wild olive tree you are grafted on the true olive tree, participating in its fruitfulness. After that you are led by the hand, into the pool of God's baptism, like Christ, from the cross to the grave which is before you. Each one is asked if you believe in the Father, in the Son and in the Spirit. You confess saving faith. Then you are immersed three times in the water and you come up out of the water, thus signifying symbolically the burial of three days of the Lord. For just as our Savior stayed three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, so also, you too, in coming out for the first time, you represented the first day that Christ passed on earth and in replunging yourself in the water, the night which followed it. Just as the one who is in the night sees no more, whereas the one who is in the day lives in full light, just as during your immersion, as in the night, you see nothing, but in your coming out of the water, you find yourself in full day. In like manner you die and you are born in the same moment and that holy water served you at the same time as a tomb and a mother. And that which Solomon said in another connection can be well applied to you: There is, he said, a time to be born and a time to die. For you, in reverse, were is a time to die and a time to be born: a single instant operated the one and the other and your birth coincided with your death." [2nd *Mystagogique* Catechism, 2-4]

