

Karl Barth's Doctrine of Baptism:

An Assessment of its Plausibility as Exegesis

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Trinity College  
and the Theology Department of the Toronto School of Theology  
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## Abstract

This dissertation is an assessment of the exegetical plausibility of Barth's doctrine of baptism, responding to largely unsubstantiated dismissals of Barth's exegesis through careful exegetical engagement. The goal is not so much to evaluate Barth's exegetical arguments as it is an exploration of the extent to which a credible case can be made for Barth's doctrine of baptism in light of contemporary Biblical scholarship.

The foci of this study are two of the key issues concerning which Barth's exegesis has been heavily criticized: That of his distinction between baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water, and the centrality of the baptism of Jesus by John for his account of baptism with water. Attention is also given to the texts which Barth identifies as those normally used to support a sacramental understanding of baptism.

This study renders a positive assessment on the exegetical plausibility of Barth's doctrine of baptism, though also suggesting that Barth's doctrine of baptism might be fruitfully developed by setting aside the language of "baptism with the Spirit" to refer to the divine side of the beginning of the Christian life, and also suggesting that setting aside Barth's explicit rejection of

the language of “sacrament” might open up the possibility of fruitful engagement between Barth’s thought and contemporary discussions of church practices such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

## Acknowledgments

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# 1 Doing justice to Barth's doctrine of Baptism

I foresee that this book, which by human judgment will be my last major publication, will leave me in the theological and ecclesiological isolation which has been my lot for almost fifty years. I am thus about to make a poor exit with it. So be it! The day will come when justice will be done to me in this matter too.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly before his death in 1968 Barth published *Die Lehre von der Versöhnung*, 4, hereafter referred to as “the baptism fragment” or simply as IV/4, knowing full well that the doctrine of baptism expounded in this final installment of his *Church Dogmatics* would not be received with open arms by his contemporaries. Not only does the baptism fragment reinforce Barth's opposition to paedobaptism, but it does so through offering a thoroughly ethical interpretation of water baptism.<sup>2</sup> Departing from widespread and deeply held ecclesial tradition, Barth firmly rejected any sacramental interpretation of baptism where divine action might be understood to take place in, with, or under the human action, making a clear distinction between baptism with the Holy Spirit as the divine action which brings about human faithfulness and baptism with water which is a human action, a concrete step of human obedience which corresponds to the divine action.

Barth's prediction that he would find himself once again isolated played out, John Webster noting that the baptism fragment went “largely unnoticed and has had negligible impact on

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, *Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV/4 of *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), xii

<sup>2</sup>Barth had already departed from the typical Reformed emphasis on the passivity of the recipient of baptism and criticized the practice of infant baptism in his *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism* (London: SCM Press, 1948). For an account of the shifts in Barth's understanding of baptism, see John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 119–32; Daniel Migliore, “Reforming the Theology and Practice of Baptism: The Challenge of Karl Barth,” in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, ed. David Willis and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 494–99. See also Mark Husbands, “Barth's Ethics of Prayer: A Study in Moral Ontology and Action,” Unpublished Dissertation (Toronto: University of St. Michael's College, 2005), 171–86.



interpretations of Barth's thought."<sup>3</sup> While there was some initial discussion among German-speaking theologians, serious engagement among English-speaking theologians began to emerge only towards the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s with the work of John Macken, and especially Webster's 1995 *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 11.

<sup>4</sup>John Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics: Karl Barth and His Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*. Early German-language engagements with the fragment include H. Stirnimann, "Karl Barths Tauffragment," *Freiburger Zeitschrift Für Philosophie und Theologie* 15 (1968): 3–28, Anno Quadt, "Die Taufe als Antwort des Glaubens," *Theologische Revue* 6 (1968): 468–74, E. Schlink, *Die Lehre von der Taufe* (Kassel, 1969), Dieter Schellong, "Der Ort der Tauflehre in der Theologie Kart Barths," in *Warum Christen ihre Kinder nicht mehr taufen lassen*, ed. Dieter Schellong (Frankfurt a.M: Stimme-Verlag, 1969), F Viering, *Zu Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe* (Gütersloh, 1971), which includes Kurt Aland, "Taufe und Kindertaufe," in *Taufe und Kindertaufe* (Gütersloh, 1971) and Erich Dinkler, "Die Taufaussagen des neuen Testaments: neu untersucht in Hinblick auf Karl Barths Tauflehre," in *Zu Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe*, ed. F. Viering (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971), 60–153, H. Hübert, *Der Streit um die Kindertaufe* (Frankfurt/M, 1971), Richard Schlüter, *Karl Barths Tauflehre*, Studies on Denominational and Controversial Theology (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifacius, 1973), T. Rendtorff, "Der ethische Sinn der Dogmatik," in *Die Realisierung der Freiheit* (Gütersloh, 1975), 119–34, Eberhard Jüngel, "Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe," in *Barth-Studien* (Mohr: Gütersloh, 1982), 291–94 and Eberhard Jüngel, "Thesen zu Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe," in *Barth-Studien* (Mohr: Gütersloh, 1982), 246–94. Early English and French-language engagements include Arthur C. Cochrane, "Review of *Church Dogmatics* IV/4," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 5 (1968): 745–57, H. Hartwell, "Die Kirchliche Dogmatic, v 4, pt 4: Das christliche Leben (Fragment): die Taufe als Begründung des christlichen Lebens," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (March 1969): 10–29, Eberhard Jüngel, "Die Kirchliche Dogmatic, v 4, pt 4: Das christliche Leben (Fragment): die Taufe als Begründung des christliche Lebens," *Lutheran World* 16, no. 1 (1969): 78–83 Allan Douglas Galloway, "Church Dogmatics, v 4: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Pt 4," *Journal of Theological Studies* Ns 21, no. 1 (April 1970): 259–60, Ernest Alexander Payne, "Church Dogmatics, v 4: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Pt 4," *Expository Times* 81, no. 7 (April 1970): 206–07, Robin H.S. Boyd, "Church Dogmatics, v 4: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Pt 4," *Indian Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (January-March 1973): 37–40, Aldo Moda, "Le Baptême Chrétien: Sacrement Ou Action Humaine?" *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 54, no. 2 (1974): 219–47, G. Wainwright, "Développements Baptismaux Depuis 1967," *Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses* 49 (1974): 67–93, T. F. Torrance, "The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church," in *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Toward Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (London, 1975), 82–105, John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1978), Arthur C. Cochrane, "Markus Barth--an un-Barthian Barthian: The Place of the Doctrine of Baptism in the Church Dogmatics," in *Intergerini Parietis Septum (Eph 2:14): Essays Presented to Markus Barth on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Dikrany Hadidian (Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1981), 39–50. In addition to the works discussed in the survey of engagements with Barth on baptism below, conversation continued with R. Weth, "Taufe in den Tod Jesu Christi als Anfang eines Neuen Lebens," in *Gottes Zukunft - Zukunft der Welt. Festschrift für Jürgen Moltmann zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. H Deuser, et. al. (Munich, 1986), 147–58, A. Demura, "Zwingli in the Writings of Karl Barth - with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of the Sacraments," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition*, ed. E. A. McKee and B. G. Armstrong (Louisville, 1989), 197–219, H.

Generally speaking, most contemporary interpreters of Barth's doctrine of baptism can be divided between those who see the baptism fragment as marking the culmination of the *Church Dogmatics*, as a lens through which the preceding volumes ought to be viewed, and those who see it as the unfortunate manifestation of unresolved problems that had been present, though muted, in earlier volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. For the former, the baptism fragment is the full coming to fruition of important elements of Barth's theology, his approach to analogy and the doctrine of election being particularly important. The latter see problematic aspects of the earlier volumes of *Church Dogmatics*, Barth's understandings of analogy, christology and pneumatology in particular, leading to problems of dualism and docetism in the baptism fragment. Some of these interpreters critique the baptism fragment as a discussion of baptism while appreciating aspects of Barth's ecclesial and ethical concerns, while others see it as an unfortunate appendix to the *Church Dogmatics* with little, if any, redeeming value.

A common characteristic of both those who do and those who do not appreciate the baptism fragment is that their discussions center on dogmatic and philosophical issues, paying relatively little attention to the exegetical grounding of Barth's argument. Barth's exegesis is mentioned and praised as convincing or criticized as unconvincing, but there tends to be little discussion of the texts in question in support of either assessment. But from the first edition of the *Römerbrief* to the last part-volume of the *Church Dogmatics* Barth understood his theology as arising from and being grounded firmly in Scripture, and any serious engagement with his work needs to engage seriously with him on exegetical issues. The present study seeks to do justice to Barth's doctrine of baptism, addressing the lack of careful exegetical engagement with it through

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Mottu, "Les Sacrements Selon Karl Barth et Eberhard Jüngel," *Foi et Vie* 88 (1989): 35–55, John E. Colwell, "Alternative Approaches to Believer's Baptism (from the Anabaptists to Barth)," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 7 (1989), Frederick J. Gaiser, "Baptism, Barth, and Born Again," *Word & World* 14 (Winter 1994): 3–5, Wingkwong Lo, *Des Werk des Menschen und die Gnade Gottes in Karl Barths Sakramentstheologie* (1994), Bryan D. Spinks, "Karl Barth's Teaching on Baptism: Its Development, Antecedents, and the 'Liturgical Factor'," *Ecclesia Orans* 14 (1997) Graham Watts, "Baptism and the Hiddenness of God," in *Dimensions of Baptism* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002) Timothy George, "Running Like a Herald to Deliver the Message: Barth on the Church and Sacraments," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006).

offering an assessment the plausibility of Barth's doctrine of baptism as exegesis of the New Testament.

## 1.1 Outline

This thesis is divided into six chapters. This first introductory chapter briefly situates the baptism fragment within the *Church Dogmatics* and gives a brief overview of some of the English language engagement with the baptism fragment before addressing the methodological assumptions for this study and outlining the conclusions reached. The second chapter provides a brief overview of the baptism fragment itself, showing how the particular exegetical issues addressed in subsequent chapters fit into Barth's argument more broadly.

The third chapter argues for the exegetical plausibility of Barth's distinction between baptism with water and baptism with the Holy Spirit through a discussion of three exegetical focal points. Drawing particularly upon the work of James Dunn concerning the importance of baptism as a metaphor, it is argued that John the Baptist's words concerning a coming baptism of Spirit and fire do not refer to Christian baptism as a baptism with water that is also a baptism with Spirit. Furthermore, it is argued that the baptismal narratives in Acts indicate a clear distinction between water baptism and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Finally, it is argued that 1 Corinthians 12.13 is another metaphorical use of the language of baptism to refer to the reception of the Spirit rather than a reference to the rite of water-baptism.

The exegetical focus of the fourth chapter is Barth's treatment of Matthew 28.19 and the basis of Christian baptism. Barth's argument that Matthew 28.19 is a missional command, and that the baptism of Jesus by John is the basis for Christian baptism finds strong support, Barth's argument being supplemented by an argument that Jesus carried out a ministry of baptism throughout his career.

Chapter five addresses four of the texts which Barth identifies as being usually appealed to in order to provide an exegetical basis to the sacramental tradition. Barth's argument for a non-sacramental understanding of baptism is supported in each case. Two of these texts, Ephesians 5.26 and Titus 3.5, are texts which speak of washing. It is argued that for neither of these texts is the washing referring to baptism. To the contrary, in the case of Ephesians 5.26, the image of a bridal bath occurs in the context of a discussion of how Christ's sacrificial love is a model for

how husbands ought to love their wives, and in the case of Titus 3.5 Old Testament and Pentecost imagery of the outpoured Spirit is associated with cleansing and renewal. Galatians 3.27 is discussed in conversation with J. L. Martyn. While Martyn understands baptism in this text in sacramental terms, it is argued that Martyn's understanding of Galatians more broadly, and in particular Galatians 3.1-5, suggest a non-sacramental understanding of Galatians 3.27. The discussion of Romans 6.3-4 confirms Barth's argument that burial be understood as a distinct moment subsequent to death, so that co-burial with Christ in baptism is a witness to a prior union with Christ rather than a sacramental event bringing about union with Christ in his death. Three related texts, Acts 16.22, Hebrews 10.22, Colossians 2.11, are discussed in an Appendix.

A sixth and final chapter summarizes the exegetical results of this study and identifies the ordering of baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water as well as the question of distinguishing the salvific and prophetic work of the Spirit in the narratives of Acts as areas of exegetical challenge for Barth's account. In this concluding chapter I return to the methodological questions addressed in the introductory chapter, here drawing on the work of John Howard Yoder to argue for the importance of historical critical scholarship in helping the church's theological interpretation as communal self-reflection not decline into communal self-justification. While this study most immediately makes a contribution to the assessment of Barth's doctrine of baptism, I suggest that it also contributes to broader discussions of the Scriptural witness to baptism and of the theological interpretation of Scripture. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of two suggestions for how Barth's doctrine of baptism might be fruitfully developed. I suggest that setting aside language of "baptism with the Spirit" may help clarify Barth's account of the divine side of the beginning of the Christian life and may remove some of the difficulties reconciling Barth's account and the narratives of Acts. Finally, I suggest that setting aside Barth's rejection of the language of sacrament might contribute to a fruitful development of his doctrine of baptism and raise the question of whether Barth's understanding of baptism as faithful human action which bears witness to the divine action to which it responds and corresponds might open up the possibility of understanding baptism as a sacramental "visible word."

## 1.2 The location of the baptism fragment in the *Church Dogmatics*

The baptism fragment is the first part of what was to be a larger ethics of Reconciliation. Barth concludes each of the four “volumes” of his massive *Church Dogmatics* with an ethical section wherein he addresses human action from the standpoint of the particular doctrinal locus of the volume. For example, volume two, the Doctrine of God, concludes with “The Command of God,” where Barth discusses human action and agency in light of his previous discussion of God as the one who loves in freedom, and who exercises this loving freedom in the election of humanity in Jesus Christ. For Barth, ethics is an integral part of the doctrine of God, where “ethics interprets the Law as the form of the Gospel, i.e., as the sanctification which comes to man through the electing God.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, volume three, the Doctrine of God the Creator, concludes with “The Command of God the Creator” which shows “to what extent the one command of the one God who is gracious to man in Jesus Christ is also the command of his creator and therefore already the sanctification of the creaturely action and abstention of man.”<sup>6</sup> Volume four, the Doctrine of Reconciliation, was to conclude with a section dealing with ethics “from the standpoint of the reconciliation of the world with God effected in Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

In the preface to the baptism fragment Barth gives a brief description of what he had in mind, explaining that the combination of illness, age, and less engagement with students led to a lack of the mental energy and drive needed to finish volume four. As “the free and active answer of man to the divine work and word of grace (IV, 1-3),” Barth planned to begin his ethics of reconciliation with baptism as the foundation of the Christian life, before then addressing the “various practical aspects of Christian life under the guidance of the Lord’s Prayer,” and concluding with a discussion of the Lord’s Supper “as the thanksgiving which responds to the presence of Jesus Christ in his self-sacrifice and which looks forward to his future.”<sup>8</sup> While Barth

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<sup>5</sup>Karl Barth, *Doctrine of God*, vol. II/2 of *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 509.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Barth, *Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III/4 of *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 3.

<sup>7</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, viii.

<sup>8</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, ix.

had been working on his exposition of the Lord's Prayer, it was the opening section of Baptism that Barth chose to publish as the final installment of the *Church Dogmatics*.<sup>9</sup>

In explanation of his decision to publish the fragment, Barth notes that there was already an abstract of the lectures he gave on baptism in 1959-60 being circulated. These lectures present Barth's "radically new view" of baptism, rendering the views expressed in his earlier publication, *The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism*, outdated.<sup>10</sup> Barth decided that these views should be made more widely available through publishing the fragment. In addition to updating his published position on baptism, Barth also suggests that his treatment of baptism in the fragment reveals how he was planning to approach a range of concepts, and so hints at what his doctrine of the Lord's Supper might have looked like had a fuller treatment of the Ethics of Reconciliation been completed. And finally, Barth explains that the baptism fragment addresses a concern that he had to speak of Christian and churchly responsibility and maturity before God and the world in response to contemporary speaking of the world having come of age in relation to God.<sup>11</sup> While Barth notes that the reorientation or *aggiornamento* of his doctrine of baptism confirms and strengthens his opposition to the practice of infant baptism, he insists that it is his positive teaching on baptism that is most significant, as it is his positive teaching on baptism that makes his objection to the practice of infant baptism intelligible.

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<sup>9</sup>Barth's work on the Lord's Prayer was posthumously published as Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV,4 Lecture Fragments*, tr Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

<sup>10</sup>Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church*.

<sup>11</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer first used the term "world that has come of age" in a 1944 letter to refer to the idea that humanity "has learnt to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 106-107. This aspect of Bonhoeffer's thought was picked up on by the "death of God" theologies of the 60s. See Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1966).

### 1.3 Engagement with the fragment: A selective account

Is Barth's a-theology of sacraments inconsistent with the rest of his theology, or is it pointing the way to a more radically reformed dogmatics of worship?<sup>12</sup>

The negligible impact that the baptism fragment has had on interpretations of Barth's thought that Webster identifies is in spite of the fact that early English-language engagements with the baptism fragment appear to have been relatively positive. Herbert Hartwell's 1969 review summarizes Barth's argument with relatively few critical comments. While Hartwell concludes with some critical questions, these concerns do not involve Barth's exegesis. To the contrary, Hartwell comments positively on Barth's exegesis at various points in his exposition of IV/4, noting that Barth "examines whether the sacramental view of Baptism is biblically justified and, in so doing, takes great pains to do justice to the relevant Scripture passages," and concludes that Barth gives a "carefully balanced verdict."<sup>13</sup>

Another early English-language review of the fragment appeared in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* in 1968. The author of this review, Arthur C. Cochrane, represents one of the strongest advocates of the baptism fragment, insisting that the direction that Barth takes concerning baptism and the beginning of the Christian life in IV/4 is a logically necessary consequence of the christological-soteriological principles of CD IV/1-3, and indeed of the whole *Church Dogmatics*: "Let no one think that he can dismiss Barth's teaching about baptism without opposing the basic premise of his whole theology!"<sup>14</sup> While expressing some reservations in this

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<sup>12</sup>James J. Buckley, "Christian Community, Baptism, and Lord's Supper," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 208.

<sup>13</sup>Hartwell, "Die Kirchliche Dogmatic, v 4, pt 4," 24.

<sup>14</sup>Cochrane, "Review of *Church Dogmatics* IV/4," 745. Writing only a few years later, Dieter Schellong took a similar position, suggesting that the fragment sheds particular light on how the earlier volumes of the dogmatics are to be interpreted: "In my view KD IV/4, with the denial of infant baptism, is the test whether or not one has understood or has a clue about what it is that Barth is up to and what Barth intended, and which way it was he sought." Dieter Schellong, "Karl Barth als Theologe der Neuzeit," in *Karl Barth und die Neuzeit*, vol. 173, ed. K. G. Steck and D. Schellong, *Theologische Existenz heute*, N.F. (München: C. Kaiser, 1973), 72. Agreeing with view, Timothy Gorrington suggests that Schellong's comment "implies a devastating comment on much

early review, in a subsequent paper Cochrane strengthens his advocacy for the baptism fragment as a coming to fruition of Barth's christological theology: while later interpreters will suggest that Barth's discussion of the threefold form of the Word of God and the sacramental character of preaching in I/1 and I/2 represent resources within the *Church Dogmatics* which might be developed as a corrective to IV/4, Cochrane sees them as aspects of the Reformed theological tradition which Barth had not yet subjected to christological critique.<sup>15</sup> According to Cochrane, in this last part-volume the "fundamental tenet" of Barth's theology, that "God is not man and man is not God, and there is no way from man to God: only a gracious coming of God to man," is applied to the doctrine of baptism in such a way as to remove all vestiges of existentialism from Barth's theology. The distinction between God and man being "sharpened by a categorical rejection of the Roman Catholic *analogia entis*," in the baptism fragment Barth's theology preserves the freedom of God and the free responsibility of the human creature before God.<sup>16</sup> Noting the heavily exegetical character of IV/4, Cochrane describes Barth's exegesis as "careful," commenting that "although it departs from the almost unanimous position taken by exegetes, on the whole we found it restrained and convincing. Only in the case of Romans 6:3-4 did we find the argumentation unnecessarily strained."<sup>17</sup>

Another figure in the contemporary debate concerning Barth and sacrament is Thomas Torrance. While Torrance's discussion of the issue of sacrament in *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* is relatively brief, it is noteworthy for having been responded to by a number of subsequent interpreters. Torrance argues that Barth's doctrine of baptism is dualistic, and traces

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Anglo-Saxon reception of Barth" Timothy Gorrige, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 262.

<sup>15</sup>Cochrane, "Markus-Barth--an un-Barthian Barthian," 44.

<sup>16</sup>Cochrane, "Markus-Barth--an un-Barthian Barthian," 40-41.

<sup>17</sup>Cochrane, "Review of *Church Dogmatics* IV/4," 751. Beyond his positive assessment of the baptism fragment, Cochrane also built upon Barth's approach in his own discussion of the Lord's Supper, Arthur C. Cochrane, *Eating and Drinking with Jesus. An Ethical and Biblical Inquiry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).



the root of this to a dualism that appears in *CD IV/1*.<sup>18</sup> According to Torrance, this dualism leads to christological problems, which give birth to a dualistic view of baptism. Torrance differs from Cochrane in that, where Cochrane sees continuity, Torrance locates a decisive shift in Barth's thought in *IV/1*, though he also acknowledges a connection between this shift and Barth's earlier rejection of the *analogia entis*. However, rather than seeing Barth's later position as a logical development of his earlier position on analogy, as does Cochrane, Torrance sees it as an problematic radicalization of Barth's earlier position.<sup>19</sup>

John Macken also criticizes Barth's distinction of human and divine in the fragment, though Macken locates the problem much further back in Barth's *Church Dogmatics* than does Torrance. Macken argues that Barth's doctrine of baptism is rooted primarily in the Calvinist philosophical principal *finitum non capax infiniti*,<sup>20</sup> arguing that Barth has emphasized the Reformed tradition's tendency to marginalise nature in favour of grace. Acknowledging an increased emphasis on the efficacy in a human of divine action in the baptism fragment, where there is real internal transformation such that the proper action of the human subject can be said to be inspired by grace, Macken notes that there is still no "divinisation" or transformation of nature by grace.<sup>21</sup> This is because the emphasis of efficacy of divine action in humanity is accompanied by "the increased influence of the distinction between the divine and the human, the transcendent and the immanent, the finite and the infinite" which Macken attributes to the "spiritualizing philosophy" which underlies the reformed tradition, and which "concentrates on

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<sup>18</sup>Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 134.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth*, 138.

<sup>20</sup>Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 148. See also Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 83, 87, 155, 176. Macken's assessment of Barth's discussion of baptism is situated within a larger project of tracing the theme of autonomy through the *Church Dogmatics*. In particular, Macken argues that Barth's use of the terms autonomy, freedom and correspondence in the fragment, which are integral to his doctrine of baptism, need to be understood in light of his earlier development of these themes in *CD II* and *III*. See Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 55–56.

<sup>21</sup>Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 82. Macken notes that, for Barth, grace does not elevate nature. Human actions are not supernaturally transformed, but remain only a creaturely correspondence to divine action. Macken puts the issue of analogy in the context of nature and grace, seeing a close connection between Barth's late position and his earlier rejection of the *analogia entis*.

knowledge as the point of mediation between God and man.”<sup>22</sup> With Torrance, Macken sees a connection between Barth’s late doctrine of baptism and his christology. Macken points out that with his rejection of the *communicatio idiomatum*, Barth denied that grace transformed or divinised human nature even in the case of Christ.<sup>23</sup>

Macken’s rooting of what he understands to be problematic aspects of Barth’s thought in the reformation is an alternative to rooting these problems in modern idealism as others have done. As appreciative as Macken is of elements of these idealist reinterpretations of Barth, he ultimately finds them unsatisfactory, arguing that idealist readings such as that of Rendtorff and Freyd disregard the non-idealist and non-systematic elements of Barth’s work where Barth critiques and corrects idealism through his relational and personalist thinking, expressed in his synonymous use of history and encounter.<sup>24</sup> In opposition to idealist readings of Barth, Macken identifies a number of ways in which it is Barth’s worries about idealism which contribute to the development of his doctrine of baptism.<sup>25</sup>

But while the fragment is a positive step in offering a “more generous recognition of the autonomy of the human ethical subject,” Macken judges that it is a “retrograde step” in terms of the proper understanding of baptism itself, the positive gains being offset by “typically Barthian denials to balance the affirmations,” mediation being restricted to “narrow categories of word and witness, command and obedience” and “the Biblical testimony to other categories” being ignored, and Barth’s ontology being “excessively limited by the christological constriction and

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<sup>22</sup>Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 83. See also Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 147.

<sup>23</sup>Against those who accuse Barth of idealism, Macken suggests that Barth’s rejection of the *communicatio idiomatum* arises from his rejection of Idealism: “The notion of a divinised human nature of Christ, deserving of our worship, leads, Barth argues, to German idealism and the subsequent anthropocentric theology. In order to bar the door to any form of divinisation of man Barth is compelled to place Christ’s humanity below with man.” Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 61.

<sup>24</sup>Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 143. Macken briefly discusses a series of idealist interpretations that were sparked off by Trutz Rendtorff’s “Radical Autonomy of God,” giving most attention to that of Christophe Freyd. See Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 111–16, 133–38. See also Macken’s discussion of the debate between Geense and Harle, Sauter and Gestrich concerning whether Barth was more Idealist or Biblical. Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 120–23.

<sup>25</sup>Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 148. In addition to the Christological issue just discussed, Macken also portrays Barth’s shift away from his conception of the threefold Word of God in terms of a rejection of idealism.

the ontology of grace.”<sup>26</sup> According to Macken, Barth’s ontology reduces the order of creation to the order of grace, and is at the root of problems with his anthropology, his doctrine of creation, and his ecclesiology: “Barth’s tendency to reduce the order of Creation to the order of grace shows itself also in his ecclesiology. Barth does too little justice to the specific character and the subjectivity of the Church, to its relatively independent being, out of an anxiety that the glory of God might thereby be diminished.”<sup>27</sup> And so, while Macken acknowledges that Barth had some legitimate concerns with respect to the way sacrament might be used to render the Church immune from judgment and defends him against the charge of being an idealist, he agrees with Rendtorff that the consequences of Barth’s position are “the dissolution of any workable concept of Church and the reduction of dogmatics to ethics.”<sup>28</sup>

Macken provides little evidence in support of his claim that Barth’s doctrine of baptism is rooted in “spiritualizing philosophy” rather than exegesis. He does not discuss Barth’s exegetical arguments in any detail, nor provide alternative interpretations of specific texts. Instead, he backs up this claim through an appeal to the work of Richard Schlüter, noting that while Barth distinguishes his position from Zwingli’s, claiming that his own is exegetically based, “in Schlüter’s examination it emerges that Barth’s exegesis forcibly imports this distinction into the New Testament and that it originates precisely in the philosophical bias of his tradition.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 159.

<sup>27</sup> Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 178.

<sup>28</sup> Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 180. Macken suggests that Rendtorff presented Barth as a radical liberal turning the enlightenment weapons against itself, asserting the freedom and autonomy of God rather than of humanity. Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 125. Barth used the theological tradition to “dispose” of its challenge and questions: “Barth’s aim was to overcome the burden of tradition by subjecting it to a radical systematic revision and so to ‘liquidate’ the liability imposed on modern autonomy by the history of Christian thought.” Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 126. However, “far from attaining his aim of reversing the Enlightenment, Barth became the instrument by which the Enlightenment, with its boundless moral optimism and its separation of Christianity from the Church, pursued its conquering advance into the heart of Christianity.” Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 127.

<sup>29</sup> Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 197, n.186. See Schlüter, *Karl Barths Tauflehre*, 159, 248. Dieter Clausert raises questions about Schlüter’s assessment of Barth, expressing the worry that Schlüter’s ecumenical interests skew his reading of Barth. Dieter Clausert, “Karl Barth’s Tauflehre,” *The Ecumenical Review* 28, no. 2 (April 1976): 225.

A watershed in the assessment of the baptism fragment was the publication of John Webster's *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* in 1995, this being the first attempt to give a full-scale assessment of the baptism fragment within the context of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation more broadly. Webster explains that the early literature responding to the baptism fragment focused narrowly on sacramental theology and practice without giving due attention to the context of these issues within the *Church Dogmatics*, i.e. as part of a broader treatment of Christian *ethics* from the standpoint of the reconciliation accomplished in Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike much previous discussion of the baptism fragment, Webster is focused not only on sacramental and ecclesial issues, but treats the baptism fragment within the context of a discussion of Barth's ethics of reconciliation.

Responding to criticism of Barth's ontology and his account of human agency, Webster argues that Barth's ethics of reconciliation is a "moral ontology." Webster sees an underlying continuity in Barth's work, suggesting that Barth's ethics of reconciliation can serve as a test-case for reading Barth in such a way that "what he has to say about the divine action is fully coherent with, and inseparable from, what he says of the active life of humanity in correspondence with God."<sup>31</sup> Over against the critiques of Macken and others,<sup>32</sup> Webster suggests that Barth's ethics of reconciliation provides constructive resources for developing a Christian account of human agency that addresses the tension between grace and morality, a moral ontology where prior divine activity creates the space for human activity in ordered correspondence with itself. Webster discusses Barth's doctrine of baptism in the fragment in this context:

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<sup>30</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 10–11.

<sup>31</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 8–9.

<sup>32</sup>Webster interacts with Macken at various places throughout his *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*. For his interaction with Roberts, see Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 16. See also R. H. Roberts, "Barth and the Eschatology of Weimar," in *A Theology on Its Way? Essays on Karl Barth* (Edinburgh, 1991), 196 and R. H. Roberts, *Hope and Its Hieroglyph: A Critical Decipherment of Ernst Bloch's 'Principle of Hope'* (Atlanta, 1990), 222. Roberts' portrayal of Barth as representing a Hegelian Idealist marginalisation of creation, history and human activity puts him in the company of the Idealist readings of Barth that Macken critiques. See Richard Roberts, *A Theology on Its Way? Essays on Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 3, 152.

In effect, then, Barth's doctrine of baptism in *Church Dogmatics* IV/4 replaces his earlier modest theory of sacramental mediation with an understanding of baptism as consisting of a generative divine act and a responsive human action. On the earlier account the inferior human action was a representation of and instrument of the communication of the superior operation of God. Now Barth separates these two operations into distinct spheres of agency, and the prevenient grace of God is not so much effective through creaturely mediation as evocative of a properly human ethical analogy to itself.<sup>33</sup>

While Webster describes the fragment as a replacement of Barth's earlier descriptions of sacramental mediation, he also identifies elements of continuity with Barth's earlier work, seeing his late doctrine of baptism as the development of elements present in Barth's earlier work.<sup>34</sup> Even in Barth's early work Webster identifies a critical reserve and christological rooting "which will eventually subvert the very affirmation he is making."<sup>35</sup> Webster identifies an important shift in 1943, at the time Barth was working on *CD* II/2, with the publication of *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*. While Barth still speaks of the sacraments in terms of representation, human acts attesting divine acts, and while he continues to emphasize the divine act and efficacy, Webster notes that Barth also introduces the theme of the human as an active partner rather than simply passive recipient. Baptism is *both* gift and summons. It is only with Barth's work on the doctrine of reconciliation, beginning in 1959-60, that Barth introduces an exclusive distinction between human and divine agency that conflicts with the idea of sacramental mediation. Here Barth begins to speak of the "so-called sacraments," describing

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<sup>33</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 132.

<sup>34</sup>Dividing Barth's thought on this topic into three periods, Webster describes Barth's early views, from his early Romans Commentary through *CD* II/1 as representing a traditional reformed view which emphasizes the passivity of the recipient of baptism.

<sup>35</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 122.

them as acts of human obedience *rather than* “mediations, realizations, repetitions, extensions, instruments, channels or means of grace.”<sup>36</sup>

Webster roots his discussion of the nature of sacramental mediation in Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation, particularly the “inclusive perfection” of the work of Christ. Webster uses the term “inclusive perfection” to refer to the fact that Christ’s work is such that the transition from objective to subjective, the *extra nos* to the *in nobis*, is included within the action of Christ and the Holy Spirit in bringing about God’s reconciliation of the world to himself. He notes that already in IV/1 Barth was speaking this way of “sacramental” actions not as continuations or repetitions, but as attestations of divine activity.

Over against existential and sacramental notions of how Christ’s objectivity can be made subjectively real or actual, Christ’s work already includes its communication. It is actual and efficacious apart from any other agency or event, such that human activity is attestation rather than actualization. Webster explains that this rooted in the resurrection, where Jesus Christ is not only the work, but also the word of God. This “inclusive perfection” of the work of Christ “destroys the traditional concept of baptism as a sacrament.”<sup>37</sup> Noting the absence of a connection between baptism with water and the remission of sin in Barth, Webster comments: “Once remission of sins is located in the work of Christ whose merits are distributed by the Holy Spirit, water-baptism is most naturally associated with vocation.”<sup>38</sup>

With respect to a second focal issue in Barth’s *Dogmatics*, Webster describes Barth’s doctrine of baptism as the “late flowering” of Barth’s critique of religion where both the giving and receiving of revelation are grounded in God alone. The first of three themes which Webster suggests as guides for proper interpretation of Barth, Webster describes the *CD* as “a massively ramified reassertion of the aseity of God: as an intense pursuit of the truth that neither in the

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<sup>36</sup>Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 126.

<sup>37</sup>Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 130. Here Webster quotes Jüngel, “Thesen zu Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe,” 291. See also Walter Kreck, “Karl Barths Tauflehre,” in *Zu Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe*, Fritz Viering (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971), 18.

<sup>38</sup>Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 153.

realm of being nor in the realm of knowledge is God contingent or derivative, but rather axiomatically real, true and free.”<sup>39</sup> Barth worries that religion and sacraments threaten this aseity.

Thirdly, Webster suggests that Barth’s increasing emphasis on real human action and personal responsibility is rooted in Barth’s rejection of cultural Christianity where the Christian community is seen as co-extensive with the civil community. It is this issue that connects most strongly with Barth’s forceful rejection of infant baptism, where the candidate is an object of the community’s action, insisting that Christian discipleship “cannot be inherited” or transferred from a Christian environment.<sup>40</sup>

An important issue which Webster brings into the discussion is that of pneumatology. Webster points out that “Barth negotiates the passage from objective to subjective, not through a theory of spirituality, experience, or morality, but through the doctrines of the resurrection and Holy Spirit in which the outgoing, self-realizing character of reconciliation is articulated.”<sup>41</sup> This is important for interpreting the fragment because, while Barth roots the possibility of human action in God, this should not be allowed to obscure Barth’s equally firm insistence on the reality of human agency: “Grasping this point will lead to a very different reading of Barth from that which has become established in much of the secondary literature on his pneumatology.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 2–3.

<sup>40</sup>Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 163.

<sup>41</sup>Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 97.

<sup>42</sup>Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 134. In particular Webster discusses Philip Rosato’s *The Spirit as Lord: the Pneumatology of Karl Barth*, which Webster describes as a benchmark for much criticism. Against Rosato’s critique that Barth collapses the Spirit and Son such that God is a timeless trinity closed off from any outside reality, Webster argues that “Barth’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit in his ethics of reconciliation is essentially concerned with the dignity, stature, and inalienable freedom of God’s human covenant partners; and that concern is not a *qualifying* of the Spirit as Christ’s attestation, but its inescapable *consequence*.” Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 134. See P. J. Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord: The Pneumatology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 135–36, 143. In this discussion Webster quotes Tom Smail’s judgment that Barth’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit “is... designed to affirm... human freedom and to give a theological explanation of its actuality and possibility.” T. A. Smail, “The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” in *Theology Beyond Christendom: Essays on the Centenary of the Birth of Karl Barth*, ed. J. Thompson (Allison Park, 1986), 89.

Webster notes that Barth places equal emphasis on the reality of human agency. Christ's history is not only substitutionary, but is "evocative of other histories."<sup>43</sup> Here Webster draws attention to a crucial part of the fragment where Barth argues that while human liberation comes "wholly from without" it is nonetheless the liberation of the human, Barth insisting that God's omnicausality not be construed as sole causality.<sup>44</sup> Barth is concerned about a kind of docetism where human action only seems to be human, but is actually swallowed up by the divine.<sup>45</sup> Barth is also concerned that the work of Christ be crowded out by some other work, even that of the Spirit. Against both existentialism and certain forms of sacramentalism, Barth insists that it is Jesus Christ, as the living Word, who is "immediately present and active in his Holy Spirit": "Language about the Spirit constitutes for Barth not only a necessary, but also a sufficient explanation of how it is that the Christian life comes to be."<sup>46</sup>

Webster's work represents a relatively sympathetic reading of the baptism fragment, defending Barth against a number of significant critiques, particularly his account of human agency (Robert's and Macken), and his pneumatology (Rosato). Furthermore, Webster suggests that the fragment is valuable: i) As a "negative ecclesiology" which protests any placing of the sacramental activity of the church on par or in place of the being and activity of Jesus Christ; ii) as a political theology enabling authentic Christian witness rather than the "easy pact between church and state" which Barth associates with infant baptism and civil religion; and iii) most importantly as a basis for the construction of Christian ethics, where human agency is neither identical, nor in competition, with divine agency, but finds its proper significance as genuine action in correspondence to God's prior activity."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 138.

<sup>44</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 139 See Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 22f.

<sup>45</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 105.

<sup>46</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 146.

<sup>47</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 167.



As a sacramental theology, however, Webster identifies two main dogmatic issues as problematic. The first is ecclesiology. While Webster defends Barth against Rendtorff's and Mottu's charge that Barth has an overly individualistic understanding of human decision making, he admits that "Barth's account of the corporate dimensions of Christian belief will be thought by some to be decidedly thin; such critics may conclude that Barth is to some degree docetic in this regard, allowing his distaste for mere inherited Christianity to deflect his attention away from Christianity as a mode of social belonging."<sup>48</sup>

The second dogmatic issue concerns Barth's strict separation of human and divine. While Webster suggests that those accusing Barth of being overly dualistic are missing the ethical thrust of Barth's work,<sup>49</sup> he admits that Barth's separation between human and divine agency in the fragment may be too sharp. Alluding to the relation of humanity and divinity in Christ as a model for unity in distinction without separation or confusion, Webster suggests that the "Chalcedonian pattern" may have been stretched to the breaking point.<sup>50</sup>

Like Cochrane, Webster sees continuity with elements of Barth's earlier thought, but rather than seeing it as logically necessary as Cochrane does, Webster sees it as certain elements being emphasized with some unfortunate consequences. While appreciating Barth's ethical thrust, and

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<sup>48</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 170. See Trutz Rendtorff, *Ethics* (Minneapolis, 1989), 118; Mottu, "Les Sacrements Selon Karl Barth," 51.

<sup>49</sup>See T. F. Torrance, "The One Baptism," 99; C. C. West, "Baptism in the Reformed Tradition," 25; Macken, *The Autonomy Theme*, 83–85.

<sup>50</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 173. Webster also makes reference to the relationship between Barth's christology and his ethics in his discussion of Barth's treatment of prayer in *CD III/3*. He points out that while Barth gives priority to Jesus' prayer, he expands the vicarious humanity model, insisting that Jesus is not therefore alone in praying. Jesus does not pray instead of us, but "because Christ's prayer is his action 'for others,' we may also pray 'with him,' on the basis of his achievement and its self-representation in the Spirit." Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 78. This is important for Webster's discussion of Barth and baptism because he argues that it is Torrance's own over-emphasis on the vicarious humanity of Christ that leads to his misplaced concerns about dualism in Barth: "In Torrance's account of the matter, Jesus' humanity threatens to absorb that of others; in Barth's account, Jesus' humanity graciously evokes corresponding patterns of being and doing on the part of those whom it constitutes." Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 171. See T. F. Torrance, "The One Baptism," 99, 102; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 2nd (Colorado Springs: Helmer & Howard, 1992), 83–108; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh, 1988), 146–90.

the “moral ontology” he developed in the latter volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, Webster ultimately faults Barth for letting his valid ethical concerns cause him to “make the moral consequences of Christian baptism into its material content,” suggesting that Barth’s earlier work on sacrament in *CD I/1-2* could be used as a basis for “a carefully nuanced understanding of sacramental mediation which includes sacraments as ‘means’ and ‘instruments’ of grace,” but which renders the “overly schematic separation of divine and human work which afflicts his exegesis” unnecessary.<sup>51</sup>

Webster’s comment that an overly schematic separation of divine and human work afflicts Barth’s exegesis is of a piece with the other comments Webster makes concerning the Biblical basis of Barth’s doctrine of baptism. Webster raises two exegetical objections to Barth’s argument. Specifically commenting on Barth’s identification of the baptism of Jesus by John as the ground of Christian baptism, Webster suggests that Barth’s explanation that “the New Testament does not elsewhere refer back to Jesus’ own baptism in its discussions of the beginning of the Christian life” because “for the new Testament that matter was so self-evident as to require no explanation... is hardly convincing.”<sup>52</sup> More generally, Webster suggests that Barth’s exegesis is dogmatically determined and contradicts the “plain sense” of the New Testament texts, especially Eph 5:25, Titus 3:5, Gal 3:27, Rom 6:3f. As in the case of Macken, however, Webster provides no exegetical arguments in support of his exegetical critiques.<sup>53</sup>

Paul Molnar’s *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord’s Supper: A Systematic Investigation* is a unique contribution to the discussion of Barth and sacrament in that, rather than discussing Barth’s doctrine of Baptism, Molnar aims to put forth a “presentation and development of Barth’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper” by rooting the question of sacraments in the

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<sup>51</sup> Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 172–73.

<sup>52</sup> Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 168.

<sup>53</sup> Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 169. Webster’s criticism of Barth’s exegesis is intensified in his 2004 *Karl Barth*: “The exegesis is sometimes surprisingly shoddy, dominated by special pleading, as well as by what seems at times an almost Platonic distinction between water baptism (an exclusively human act) and baptism with the Spirit (an exclusively divine act).” John Webster, *Karl Barth*, 2nd (New York: Continuum, 2004), 157.

question of the “possibilities and limitations of human knowledge of God.”<sup>54</sup> Molnar, like Cochrane and others, sees a strong continuity in Barth’s work, suggesting that Barth’s view of sacrament in the fragment “expresses the logic of his presuppositions previously explicated in his doctrine of the Word of God and his doctrine of God,”<sup>55</sup> noting particularly Barth’s primary theological concern for “God’s freedom from and freedom for his creatures.”<sup>56</sup>

Rather than a dualism or overly-schematic separation of divine and human that would threaten a “Chalcedonian pattern” for relating the two, Molnar argues that Barth’s insistence that the basis, goal and meaning of the church’s activity lies in God alone allows the church’s activity to have a “very definite and limited meaning which neither confuses, separates, nor synthesizes divine and human activity.”<sup>57</sup> Rather than reflecting a marginalization of nature in favour of grace, Molnar argues that Barth’s rejection of a sacramental view of baptism as an elevation of human nature “actually preserves grace as grace and the human acts as a fully human act, and as an act changed by grace, because it lives from the command and promise of God in Christ.”<sup>58</sup>

Molnar’s difference from Webster in this regard is perhaps more a matter of degree than of kind, however, in that Molnar also expresses a concern that the sharpness of Barth’s distinctions implies that God is not also free to come through the mediating actions of the church.<sup>59</sup> Molnar also worries about the pneumatological and ecclesiological implications of IV/4, suggesting that at times Barth could “call upon the Holy Spirit while ignoring the work accomplished by the Spirit in the visible sphere,” and echoing Webster’s suggestion that Barth’s conception of

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<sup>54</sup>Paul Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord’s Supper: A Systematic Investigation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), ix.

<sup>55</sup>Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 233.

<sup>56</sup>Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 3.

<sup>57</sup>Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 12–13.

<sup>58</sup>Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 301. Here Molnar touches on the issue of synergism. Because for Barth “God meets us in the form of our historical reality but can neither be identified with, separated from, nor synthesized with that form,” he is an important corrective to symbolic approaches to the sacraments: “Our human actions do not *constitute* our fellowship with God or with each other.”

<sup>59</sup>Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 234.

sacrament in the opening volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* might serve as a resource for correcting his later position.<sup>60</sup>

George Hunsinger contributes to the discussion of the fragment by pursuing the idea that the ideas of the opening volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* might be a resource for articulating a doctrine of baptism. While Hunsinger views the fragment as a logically consistent with the earlier volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, he argues that it is one of a number of logically consistent ways forward rather than a logically necessary development. Proposing to follow a Barthian logic along pathways not explored by Barth, Hunsinger appeals to Barth's discussion of the threefold form of the Word of God as resource for understanding water baptism as a secondary, dependent form of Spirit baptism.<sup>61</sup> He suggests that understanding the relationship between these two baptisms according to a Chalcedonian pattern, here described as a *koinonia* relationship, can replace talk of causality and so "synergism can ... be banished (in the pernicious sense) while a proper co-operation with grace is retained."<sup>62</sup>

Discussion concerning the relationship between the baptism fragment and the earlier volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* continued with Kurt Richardson's *Reading Karl Barth: New Directions for North American Theology*. While not speaking of the fragment as an inevitable "logical outcome," as does Cochrane, Richardson speaks in terms of the full development and

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<sup>60</sup>Molnar, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord's Supper*, 237, 305.

<sup>61</sup>George Hunsinger, "Baptism and the Soteriology of Forgiveness," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2 (2000): 254–55.

<sup>62</sup>Hunsinger, "Baptism and the Soteriology of Forgiveness," 265. Hunsinger faults those who critique Barth's soteriology and ecclesiology for typically making "actualism (again and again) and gradualism (more and more) - that is, the categorical and the relative - mutually exclusive." George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 267. On the *koinonia* relationship/Chalcedonian pattern Hunsinger proposes, see Hunsinger, "Baptism and the Soteriology of Forgiveness," 249 and Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 185–88, 201–18. Mark Husbands suggests that the worries that Hunsinger expresses concerning Barth's doctrine of baptism might also be addressed by attending to Barth's understanding of Invocation as "that to which God summons the community of grace.... The concrete work of the Spirit brings about an effective and genuine union of the human creature with the *Christus praesens*; and it is precisely this, we suspect, that Hunsinger is looking for in Barth." Husbands, "Barth's Ethics of Prayer," 245.

clarification of Barth's understanding of the divine-human relationship.<sup>63</sup> One of Richardson's main points is that the "irreducibly diachronic character of the successive volumes of the *CD*" is not taken into account by many interpreters.<sup>64</sup> In contrast with interpreters who read the *Church Dogmatics* through the lens of volume I, Richardson suggests that a more appropriate approach is to re-read the earlier volumes in light of the last: "If readers miss even the last volume (IV/4) or render it somehow a mere appendage, they violate Barth's witness and his intent to conform his thought to the content of revelation, even if it means assuming the role of a solitary reformer."<sup>65</sup> While he acknowledges that there were features that prepared the way for Barth's later doctrine of Baptism, Richardson emphasizes the radicality of the shift, suggesting that Barth had moved "beyond the *prolegomena* volume of the *CD* and in a sense begins over again."<sup>66</sup>

Such a re-reading, Richardson argues, reveals a "gradual letting go of language of *participation* in God in favour of a gracious *correspondence* to God in human obedience."<sup>67</sup> In Richardson's explanation of the shift between Barth's sacramental language of I/1 and I/2 to his emphasis on the distinction between the human and divine in his late doctrine of Baptism, he clearly describes Barth's increasing emphasis on the distinction of human and divine:

Some of the modes of thought in I/1 and I/2 imply convergence or even interpenetration of the divine and the human in the church

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<sup>63</sup>Kurt Anders Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth: New Directions for North American Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 10.

<sup>64</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 15.

<sup>65</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 17. John Howard Yoder has a similar critique. He worries that some interpreters place too much emphasis on the early volumes of the *CD*, as if everything was settled in the first volumes, and fail to appreciate the shifts in Barth's position. In particular, Yoder suggests that there is a progressive growth in emphasis on the concrete content of Jesus as the *CD* progresses. John Howard Yoder and Mark Thiessen Nation, eds., *Karl Barth and the Problem of War and Other Essays on Barth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 134.

<sup>66</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 167. Here Richardson refers to Schellong's statement that concerning the importance of IV/4 for understanding the rest of the *Church Dogmatics*. Richardson notes that Jüngel has a similar view of the matter Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 183. See Jüngel, "Thesen zu Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe," 287.

<sup>67</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 10.

and its service. Yet in *CD IV* Barth emphatically leaves each (the divine, the human) to its own nature and integrity... Divine action is thus fully divine; although it is entirely turned toward the human, it remains fully divine. By the same token, human action remains fully human. The two modes of action are asymmetrically reconciled on account of the divine action, but human action is liberated and given its own integrity in Christ and through the Holy Spirit.<sup>68</sup>

Against those who would appeal to I/1 and I/2 as resources for a doctrine of baptism, Richardson argues that one of the consequences of Barth's doctrine of election is that Barth sets aside the idea that the incarnation can function analogously, excluding "incarnational ecclesiology."<sup>69</sup> Responding to Hunsinger's criticism that Barth loses a proper sense of the unity between Christ and the Church, Richardson comments: "As above, since nothing about the corporate relation between Christ and the church is incarnational, since the incarnation is without analogy just as the activity of Jesus Christ's soteriological mediation is without distribution and completely *extra nos* and *pro nobis*, Hunsinger is the one who loses the proper sense of *koinonia* between Christ as the head of the church and believers as never more than his members."<sup>70</sup>

This is not to say, however, that Richardson denies any parallel between christology and soteriology. He, too, saw that Barth's concern to preserve the integrity of humanity in the incarnation was related to his concern to maintain integrity of human action in baptism:

The election of God in Jesus Christ is the root and foundation of everything else that is to follow in the *CD*; by this election the

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<sup>68</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 16.

<sup>69</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 163. Richardson is particularly critical of Hunsinger's appeal to a "Chalcedonian pattern" or "koinonia-relation" on this point, suggesting that Hunsinger is guilty of "generalizing what cannot be generalized." Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 191. Richardson connects the exclusion of incarnational analogies with Barth's rejection of *analogia entis*, suggesting that Barth's final rejection of human action "as anything closely analogous to divine action... is the final deepening and systematic extension of *analogia fidei*." Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 193.

<sup>70</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 192.

divine act and human act, while united covenantally, are ontologically distinct on account of the former as *extra nos*, eternally grounded in the being and action of God. The covenantal union is never a union in which divine being and human beings perichoretically interpenetrate, where the human being has some kind of claim or forceful influence on the divine life. Instead, on account of the representation of human life in the life of Jesus Christ, and of the penetration of the divine life of the Holy Spirit in the life of the human being, we are enabled and thus able to act in ways that correspond to divine action upon the analogy of revelation, in terms of the Word of God and our words, spoken and performative, and in acts that bear witness to the gracious reality of God in us.<sup>71</sup>

Richardson's emphasis on the impact of Barth's doctrine of election on the later development of the *Church Dogmatics* reflects the impact of Eberhard Jüngel's work on Richardson's thought. Richardson maintains that reception of Barth's doctrine of Baptism in the English-speaking world has been significantly hampered by the suppression of Jüngel's assessment and development of Barth's doctrine of Baptism.<sup>72</sup> He offers a partial remedy to the situation by presenting a summary and commentary on Jüngel's work, arguing that Jüngel "embraces Barth's

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<sup>71</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 170.

<sup>72</sup>Richardson is particularly critical of Webster on this point: "Webster's avoidance--if not subtle suppression of valid and potentially highly influential interpretation and extension of Barth's doctrine of baptism--appears to be typical of much English-language treatment of the last volume of the *CD*." Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 206. For Richardson's criticisms of Webster on this point, see also Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 177, 201. Richardson notes that other interpreters, including Hunsinger, Molnar and Mangina also do not interact with Jüngel with regard to the issue of Barth and sacraments. See Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 190, 208. While Richardson may appear to be over-reacting somewhat, he raises an interesting point when he notes that Jüngel's essays on baptism in Barth were omitted from the English translation of Jüngel's essays on Barth. Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 62.

teaching on baptism, traces its genetic support throughout most of the *CD*, shows how Barth has abandoned early notions of volume I, and further extends the discourse of IV/4.<sup>73</sup>

According to Richardson, Jüngel argued that Barth's formulation of the doctrine of election in II/2, which itself was rooted in the Christological concentration of *CD* I, necessitated "a conscious and decisive correction of his earlier formulation of the doctrine of the Word of God and the connected doctrine of sacrament."<sup>74</sup> This correction continues in Barth's doctrine of Reconciliation, where Barth's understanding of the "being of Jesus Christ as a history that has revealed the reconciliation of all human beings and their world with God, destroy[s] the traditional understanding of the traditional theological concept of baptism as a sacrament."<sup>75</sup> However, while Richardson emphasizes the changes in Barth's thought, he also points to elements of continuity. For example, while Jüngel has noted that Barth does not speak of Christ's work *in nobis* until IV/2, Richardson notes that Barth was already headed in this direction in I/1, as can be seen in Barth's treatment of "the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer."<sup>76</sup>

Richardson's relatively positive assessment of the ecclesiological and pneumatological direction that Barth takes in IV/4 runs contrary to another stream of interpretation which echoes the concerns of we saw earlier in Webster and Molnar. For example, in "The Stranger as Sacrament: Karl Barth and the Ethics of Ecclesial Practice" Joseph Mangina expresses appreciation for the ethical thrust of Barth's doctrine of baptism but suggests that Barth's ethical concerns do not demand his sacramental restrictions. Drawing on a phrase used by John Howard Yoder, Mangina asserts the compatibility of ethical and sacramental views, suggesting that "sacrament as gospel and sacrament as social process fittingly render one another."<sup>77</sup> Mangina connects this with a pneumatological problem, arguing that Barth's aversion to identifying the Spirit's work with

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<sup>73</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 176.

<sup>74</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 170. See also Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 179, 185.

<sup>75</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 185.

<sup>76</sup>Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 180, 167.

<sup>77</sup>Joseph Mangina, "The Stranger as Sacrament: Karl Barth and the Ethics of Ecclesial Practice," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* I, no. 3 (November 1999): 338.



persistent enduring social forms or practices places “unacceptable limits on constructive ecclesiology and ethics.”<sup>78</sup> While Mangina is sympathetic to Barth’s concern “that a sacramental church tends to be a complacent, self-satisfied church,” he argues that Barth’s “proposed therapy is unnecessarily drastic” and suggests that “rather than exclude the concept of ‘sacrament,’ it makes far more sense to develop a sacramentality oriented around the gospel story and the call to discipleship.”<sup>79</sup>

The pneumatological-ecclesiological problems which Mangina discusses are similar to those at the centre of Reinhard Hütter’s forceful critique of Barth’s ecclesiology in “Karl Barth’s Dialectical Catholicism’: *Sic et Non*.” Hütter, however, takes the pneumatological and ecclesiological critique further than Mangina, arguing that Barth’s ecclesiology is occasionalistic and docetic, the Church appearing only when human witness to Christ fully coincides with its referent.<sup>80</sup> This occurs only again and again, and fully only eschatologically.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, he suggests that, for Barth, the Church’s identity rests in God alone, not in the Church as such. It is “something the Church receives ‘*je und je*,’ something which in no way and to no degree subsists in the real existing communities of witness and service,” such that the “Church’s identity is not at hand for the Church.”<sup>82</sup> The result, Hütter maintains, is a loss of concreteness, a “disembodied pneumatology and critical ecclesiology.”<sup>83</sup>

One of the noteworthy aspects of the continuing conversation about Barth’s doctrine of baptism is that lack of attention to the exegetical grounding of Barth’s understanding. On the topic of

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<sup>78</sup>Mangina, “The Stranger as Sacrament,” 333.

<sup>79</sup>Mangina, “The Stranger as Sacrament,” 339.

<sup>80</sup>Mangina argues that the christological and actualistic character of Barth’s ecclesiology does not render it occasionalistic  
Mangina, “The Stranger as Sacrament,” 329.

<sup>81</sup>Reinhard Hütter, “Karl Barth’s ‘Dialectical Catholicism’: *Sic et Non*,” *Modern Theology* 16 (2000): 146.

<sup>82</sup>Hütter, “Karl Barth’s ‘Dialectical Catholicism,’” 147.

<sup>83</sup>Hütter, “Karl Barth’s ‘Dialectical Catholicism,’” 148.

Barth's exegesis, Molnar, Hunsinger, Richardson, Mangina and Hütter are all silent.<sup>84</sup> In view of the heavily exegetical character of the baptism fragment, some assessment of Barth's exegesis surely has an important part to play in assessing his doctrine of baptism. Identifying Reinhard Hütter's work as an important exemplar of an approach to sacraments that is in opposition to that of Barth, David Demson puts the question clearly: "Are Barth's exegetical grounds... for his description of church practices clear enough and convincing enough to withstand Hütter's criticism and alternate proposal? Contrariwise, Hütter is challenged to provide more convincing exegetical grounds for his proposal than has Barth."<sup>85</sup>

While to my knowledge neither Hütter nor anyone else has responded to Demson's challenge, John Yocum's *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth* begins to provide the kind of exegetical work that had up to that point been absent. Summarizing previous research, Yocum argues that Barth's late view is neither a necessary correction nor a positive development of his early views, but a subversion of important elements of Barth's earlier theology. According to Yocum, Barth's innovation is substantial, not just terminological (against Molnar), both within his own work as well as with respect to broader tradition, but it is not a complete discontinuity, as Torrance suggests. Rather, it reflects some of Barth's central convictions concerning human agency (Webster), although it is not a necessary correction of the opening volumes of the *Dogmatics* in light of the doctrine of Election (against Jüngel). Yocum identifies Hütter's work as being similar to his own "in both theme and conclusions," differing in that Hütter "focuses on the character of the Church's ethical witness"<sup>86</sup> while Yocum is particularly concerned that Barth's rejection of sacrament undercuts key elements of Barth's theology, including "his notion of preaching, of the

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<sup>84</sup>Richardson does identify Barth's exegesis as an area requiring clarification and development concerning Barth's doctrine of Baptism. Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth*, 186.

<sup>85</sup>David Demson, "'Church Practices': Sacraments or Invocations. Hütter's Proposal in Light of Barth's," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 18, no. 1 (2002): 80. In this paper, Demson provides a clear presentation of Barth's exegesis rather than an extensive critical exegetical evaluation of Barth's arguments in terms of substantial interaction with other commentators on these passages, and insists that it is incumbent upon those who would disagree with Barth to provide alternate interpretations of these passages.

<sup>86</sup>John Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004), xvii. See Reinhard Hütter, *Evangelische Ethik als kirchliche Zeugnis: Interpretation zu einer Schlüsselfragen theologischer Ethik in der Gegenwart* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993).

transmission of the witness to revelation in the Bible, of witness in the present day, and of prayer, all of which do include some element of human communion in divine action.” Yocum argues that eliminating these elements of the *Dogmatics* would require so substantially revising it as to make it a different work altogether.<sup>87</sup>

Picking up on some of the pneumatological concerns that we have seen raised already,<sup>88</sup> Yocum identifies a danger of Christomonistic reduction in the final volumes of the *Dogmatics* such that the Holy Spirit is less than the figure found in the New Testament, and “where the possibility of a communion of divine and human action is subverted by an inattention to the ongoing stable presence of God in the body of Christ, in the indwelling Holy Spirit.”<sup>89</sup>

This pneumatological concern can be paired with Yocum’s christological concern that Barth undervalues the “revelatory and soteriological function of the humanity of Christ.”<sup>90</sup> In this regard, Yocum makes an interesting suggestion that Barth’s understanding of the time of the incarnation as “the time necessary for the assumption of temporal humanity into the being of God through the *enhypostatic-anhypostatic* quality of the humanity of Jesus Christ” functions in Barth’s theology “something like the concept of deification in some Patristic theology. It becomes the mode of union between the eternal God and his creature, who lives in space and time.”<sup>91</sup> He further suggests that Barth’s understanding of “sanctification” is in a similar field as *Theopoiesis* or *Theosis*. Noting similarities that have been identified between the christologies of Barth and Cyril of Alexandria, Yocum notes that “assuming the parallel with Cyril is justified, Keating’s argument that Cyril sees divinization effected primarily through the outpouring of the

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<sup>87</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 27–29.

<sup>88</sup>Yocum contradicts McCormack’s view that the pneumatology of the prolegomena is replaced by Christology in II/2, arguing that volume I was already christocentric, and that the issue is *how* christocentrism functions. Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 14; See Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 21–22.

<sup>89</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 16.

<sup>90</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 54.

<sup>91</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 77.

Holy Spirit, and particularly in baptism, is important for locating the weakness in Barth's account."<sup>92</sup> In particular, Yocum mentions the concept of God's supra-temporal accompaniment of humanity in time: "Where, then, might we locate a weakness in Barth's account of the Spirit that would correspond to a weakness in the supra-temporal aspect of God's eternity and an under-attention to the ongoing history of the covenant?"<sup>93</sup> Yocum suggests that it is in Barth's "reticence about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church... Christology and Pneumatology do not, together, properly shape Ecclesiology, resulting in 'an odd hiatus between the Church (in the full theological sense) and the ordinary empirical practices of the Christian community'."<sup>94</sup>

Yocum suggests that in Barth's doctrine of reconciliation there is a danger of dissolving ecclesiology into pneumatology, which can be seen in the difficulty that Barth has in "attributing sin to the 'true Church'."<sup>95</sup> Yocum observes that Hütter detects the threat of ecclesial docetism and a lack of stability within the relationship between the Church and Christ in Barth because of the "implied possibility... that the same body of people may in one case be the true Church and in another case the *Scheinkirche*, according to the character of its action." As a result, Yocum notes that there are "insufficient creaturely, social hooks on which to hang the identity of the Church *qua* Church, rather than *qua* pious society which can 'become' Church on the action of the Holy Spirit."<sup>96</sup>

Like Hunsinger and others Yocum appeals to the opening volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* over against Barth's later views, suggesting that in I/2

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<sup>92</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 80.

<sup>93</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 82.

<sup>94</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 82, quoting Joseph Mangina, "Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 4 (1999): 270. Yocum also refers to Stanley Hauerwas's appropriation of Mangina on this point. See Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 194–95.

<sup>95</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 118. While drawing on Hütter, here Yocum also refers to Nicholas Healy. See Hütter, *Evangelische Ethik*, 27; Nicholas M. Healy, "The Logic of Karl Barth's Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment, and Proposed Modifications," *Modern Theology* 10, no. 3 (July 1994): 259.

<sup>96</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 119.

Barth offers... a more attractive and cogent account of the way in which the Church's action functions as witness on the basis of something like a sacramental principle. As Barth relinquishes the possibility of a divine-human cooperation, he relinquishes a good deal of the rationale for the Church's witness functioning as a genuine sign. In ruling out a Church that is explicable simply as a human society, he also depletes the theological resources for describing the Church as a body indwelt by the Holy Spirit in a way that is humanly effective, even as it is palpably imperfect.<sup>97</sup>

Yocum's concern with Barth's theology of the Word is particularly acute, as Yocum sees this as undermining the role of Scripture in theology.<sup>98</sup> At the centre of Yocum's concern is the issue of stability and reliability of Scripture, theology, and the church. Barth's later theology undermines the reliability of the written testimony to the Word of God, undermining the basis for theology and rendering the *CD* incoherent.<sup>99</sup> It also undermines the reliability of secondary media through

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<sup>97</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 119. Yocum suggests that it is not only *CD* I/1-2, but also Barth's treatment of providence and prayer in *CD* III/3 that might provide resources within Barth's own work for a more adequate understanding of sacrament. He suggests that III/3 "would seem to offer less radical alternatives for distinguishing divine and human agency that would still be consistent with the order of the covenant relationship." Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 69. In Barth's discussion of *concursum*, Yocum notes that "double agency" is not a problem for Barth, and "he employs the traditional conceptuality of primary and secondary causes to illuminate the proper order of divine-human cooperation." Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 86. However, Yocum notes that even in III/3 this cooperation did not imply the creature had any active involvement in the covenant of grace: "In the covenant of grace the creature is not the means but only the witness and sign, the liturgical assistant, as it were, to God, who is the only effective Minister. Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 88. Yocum suggests that in this way the integrity of the covenant partners could be protected without the radical separation of the fragment: "Barth's understanding of the vicarious role of Christ's intercession, and the real causal nature of petitionary prayer, offer a way to bring human and divine determination together in a way that accords perfectly well with divine precedence and creaturely subsequence." Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 96. See Webster on this point. There are a number of areas where Webster's influence on Yocum is evident, which is not surprising given that Webster supervised the dissertation which lies at the root of Yocum's book.

<sup>98</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, xiv

<sup>99</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 30. It is with this issue in mind that Yocum criticizes Hunsinger's understanding of the relationship between text and revelation: "The Bible for Barth is an instrument by which the hearer or reader becomes contemporaneous with Christ *through* the words of the text, not apart from the character of the human words of the text.... If one

which God makes Himself an object to human knowledge in secondary objectivity, as Barth discusses in II/1. In Barth's earlier conception, Yocum argues that these secondary media, "the visible Church, audible preaching, operative sacrament... become instances of the secondary objectivity of God in his revelation."<sup>100</sup>

So while Yocum concedes to Webster that Barth's framework for the interpretation of baptism "in which the act of God grounds and secures the spontaneous human action which is the Christian life" offers a picture of Christian life that reflects core elements of Barth's theology, particularly as articulated in his doctrine of election, he insists that "as an interpretation of the nature and meaning of *baptism*, however, *CD IV/4* is a much more questionable document, both in terms of its correspondence with Barth's own theological principles, and its ramifications for other aspects of his theology, as well as being dubious as biblical exegesis."<sup>101</sup>

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severs the inner connection between the object of witness and the form of the witness itself, difficulties for the coherence of Barth's insistence on the Bible as the ground and matter of theology as a science are entailed." Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 174.

<sup>100</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 40. In this context, Yocum engages briefly with Molnar's work. Yocum agrees that Barth's conviction that God is known through God alone excludes any "transcendental method from below," but argues that this is not to exclude creaturely being and agency becoming revelation "of and by God's appointment." Contradicting Molnar, Yocum suggests that is "at least as natural to see the late position on sacraments as undermining, rather than issuing, from Barth's doctrine of the knowledge of God." Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 46. Yocum also faults Molnar for taking Barth's understanding of the *analogia entis* which he rejected as accurately representing "Roman Catholic Doctrine," citing the work of Söhngen, Mondin and Chavannes to the contrary. Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 44. See Gottlieb Söhngen, "Analogia Fidei," *Catholica* 3–4 (1934)C, vol. 3–4 Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963); Henry Chavannes, *The Analogy Between God and the World in St. Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, tr William Lumely (New York: Vantage Press, 1992).

<sup>101</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 138–39. Yocum, like Richardson, can be understood as responding to Webster. And where Richardson would fault Webster for appealing to a "Chalcedonian pattern" for understanding divine-human relations, an analogy between human and divine in Christ and in the Church is foundational for Yocum: "Ecclesial mediation, properly understood, is a consequence of what is accomplished in the incarnation. To analyze Barth's Christology critically would require a separate (and substantial) work. Here we can only indicate some lines along which such a critical analysis could proceed." Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 168. Yocum places a limitation on this, noting that secondary objectivity of the church is an extension rather than repetition of the incarnation. Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 174. Finally, Yocum appeals to Yves Congar's articulation of a traditional sacramental theology to show that "Barth's protest against any institution that is seen as holding the power to 'set the

Reflecting his judgment that “the most fundamental flaw in Barth’s doctrine of baptism in *CD* IV/4 is its implausibility as exegesis of the New Testament,”<sup>102</sup> Yocum provides the fullest exegetical discussion of the fragment. In the first place, like Webster, Yocum identifies Barth’s rooting of baptism in the baptism of Jesus by John as exegetically foundational for Barth’s argument,<sup>103</sup> noting that this move has soteriological implications of baptism in that it is with respect to Jesus’ baptism alone that Barth makes a connection between baptism and the forgiveness of sins.<sup>104</sup>

Barth’s rooting of baptism in the baptism of Jesus is one example of a general pattern which Yocum identifies of Barth’s exegesis being skewed by his dogmatic commitments. A second area of Barth’s exegesis that Yocum criticizes, identifying it as a “tendentious move”, is the distinction Barth makes between texts which refer to baptism’s basis, and those that refer to its goal or meaning. Furthermore, Yocum argues that Barth’s claim that Matthew 28 and the accounts of John the Baptist are the only places where the New Testament treats baptism as an “independent theme” is also a tendentious move. Drawing on the work of Erich Dinkler, Yocum points out that this eliminates 2 Cor 1:21ff, Titus 3:5 as well as the baptism narratives in Acts from serious consideration.<sup>105</sup> Yocum argues that Barth simply refuses to consider an instrumental role for the washing with water in Eph 5:26, Titus 3:5, and Rom 6:3ff, stating that Dinkler’s judgment that “baptism is for Paul an act on man, with real effect” reflects scholarly consensus.<sup>106</sup>

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divine allocation in motion’ does not strike against the concept of sacramental instrumentality.” Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 179.

<sup>102</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 162.

<sup>103</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 153.

<sup>104</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 153.

<sup>105</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 163. See Dinkler, “Die Taufaussagen des neuen Testaments,” 148.

<sup>106</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 163. See Dinkler, “Die Taufaussagen des neuen Testaments,” 141.

Yocum suggests that Barth's ignoring of the force of the instrumental dative τῷ λουτροῦ as apposite to ἐν ῥήματι in Eph 5:26 arises from a false opposition between the sacrifice of Christ and baptism, asking: "Why does the instrumental role of the washing eliminate the force of either 'the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Saviour,' or the 'renewal by the Holy Spirit?'"<sup>107</sup> Yocum sees Barth imposing a similar either-or choice in his comments on Titus 2:14: "Barth assumes an either-or choice here that corresponds to his own interpretive framework. It would seem legitimate for one who takes the instrumental interpretation to ask in reply why one has to make baptism and Christ's sacrifice rivals?"<sup>108</sup>

Another of Barth's moves which Yocum criticizes on exegetical grounds is the distinction between baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water. Against Barth, Yocum suggest that "in fact, the most natural interpretation of Mark 1:8 is that the phrase indicates the distinction between Christian baptism and the baptism of John."<sup>109</sup> Here Yocum also notes that most commentators see the emphasis on the relation of John's baptism to Christian baptism, rather than to two forms or "moments" in Christian baptism.<sup>110</sup> Yocum suggests that there is a "certain artificiality" to Barth's distinction between Spirit and water baptism, and that this artificiality "manifests itself in the conceptual difficulty he has in dealing with the one term 'baptism' to deal with both 'moments,' which together are described as a single 'event'."<sup>111</sup> Concluding his

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<sup>107</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 163.

<sup>108</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 163–64.

<sup>109</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 164. See Mottu, "Les Sacrements Selon Karl Barth," 43; Schlüter, *Karl Barths Tauflehre*, 102; Dinkler, "Die Taufaussagen des neuen Testaments," 149.

<sup>110</sup>Here Yocum refers to Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New Century Bible Commentary (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1976), 73–74; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, The Cambridge Greek New Testament Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 49–51; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: A&C Black, 1991), 37–43.

<sup>111</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 164. Yocum also addresses Jüngel's proposed modifications of Barth's position. He suggests that Jüngel's proposal that there are two acts which are both called "baptism" because of an analogy between their effects as "new determinations" of the baptized "is obviously strained." Furthermore, Jüngel fails to deal with the problem of the lack of a significant connection between water baptism and the forgiveness of sins in Barth's doctrine. Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 164. See Jüngel, "Thesen zu Karl Barths Lehre von der Taufe," 265–70. Mark Husband's questions the adequacy of Yocum's reading



exegetical discussion of the fragment, Yocum states that “given the weight of the tradition Barth is resisting, if his exegetical case is to be convincing, it would need to be much more clear-cut and more reliant on the straightforward meaning of passages that relate to baptism.”<sup>112</sup>

## 1.4 Assessing the plausibility of Barth’s exegesis

Take now my last piece of advice: Exegesis, Exegesis, and once more, Exegesis! If I have become a dogmatician, it is because I long before have endeavored to carry on exegesis. Let the systematic art, which can also make one mad, rest a little and hold on to the Word, to the Scriptures, which is given to us and become perhaps less systematic and more biblical theologians. For then the systematic and dogmatic tasks will certainly be taken care of as well.<sup>113</sup>

Yocum has rightly identified the significance of Barth’s exegesis for his doctrine of Baptism. If Barth’s exegesis is implausible, this is, indeed, a “fundamental flaw” in his doctrine of

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of the baptism fragment, suggesting that Yocum “speaks too confidently of the existence of a strict *disjunction* between divine and human action in Barth’s theology of baptism.” Husbands, “Barth’s Ethics of Prayer,” 246.

<sup>112</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 164. Yocum’s exegetical discussion is not confined to the fragment. He identifies a number of key exegetical problems in the previous sections of Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation which play an important role in Barth’s discussion of Baptism. One of the most important of these is Barth’s discussion of sanctification. Yocum questions whether the New Testament ever affirms *de iure* sanctification, and notes that the issue of when and how people are sanctified is one of the issues involved in the question of baptism: “While it is true that the saints do not sanctify themselves, there are strong biblical grounds for holding that they are sanctified, on the basis of the sanctification of Jesus, in baptism.” Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 112. Yocum refers here to 1 Cor 6.11 and Eph 5.26. Yocum also notes that Barth’s lack of attention to the Acts of the Apostles allows him to give little attention “to the role that the New Testament seems to assign the Spirit-empowered Church in the actual accomplishment of the work of Christ... Why is it that the account of the concrete life of the community, replete with accounts of the activity of the Spirit, prophecy, guidance, and the apparent cooperation of divine and human agency, gets so little attention?” Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 133. Yocum also suggests that there are exegetical problems involved with Barth’s discussion of the Church in volume IV. Drawing on the work of Nicholas Healy, Yocum notes that Barth’s most sustained exegetical discussion on the Church in IV/2 is an excursus on *σωμα χριστου*, and suggests that Barth’s focus on the image of the body of Christ crowds out other images for the church, such as that of temple (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19-22; Rev 3:12; 21:22), and as bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5.25ff). Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 108. See Healy, “The Logic of Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology”. For Healy’s reconsideration of his critique, see Nicholas M. Healy, “Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology Reconsidered,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57 (2004): 287–99.

<sup>113</sup> Karl Barth, “Das Evangelium in der Gegenwart,” *Theologische Existenz Heute* 25 (1935): 17. Cited from Richard Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 30.

Baptism.<sup>114</sup> Barth understood exegesis to be foundational to theology, systematic and dogmatic reflection following upon exegetical work.<sup>115</sup> In the preface of the fragment Barth explains that it was the exegetical work of his son Markus that convinced him “to abandon the ‘sacramental’ understanding of baptism,” and any reader will notice that a significant amount of the baptism fragment is devoted to exegetical discussion.<sup>116</sup> While Zwingli may have based his rejection of sacrament in the philosophical principle “that an external thing cannot do an internal work, that a material thing cannot accomplish or reveal what is spiritual,” Barth intends to ground his doctrine of baptism firmly in the New Testament.<sup>117</sup>

And yet, as the preceding survey of engagement with Barth’s doctrine of baptism has shown, the exegetical grounding of Barth’s doctrine of baptism has received relatively little attention. Discussion has focused almost exclusively on dogmatic and philosophical arguments with little attention to the exegetical grounding of Barth’s position. Where Barth’s exegesis is commented upon it is more often dismissed than actually refuted. Even Yocum provides only a few specific exegetical comments, failing to really grapple Barth’s exegetical arguments.<sup>118</sup>

The present study is an attempt to fill this lacuna through an assessment of the plausibility of Barth’s doctrine of baptism as exegesis. This project is driven by the conviction that, as Paul

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<sup>114</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 162. Similarly Cochrane notes that “ultimately Barth’s doctrine stands or falls with his exegesis.” Cochrane, “Review of *Church Dogmatics IV/4*,” 751.

<sup>115</sup>Burnett observes that “it has been shown that the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* contain even more exegesis than the earlier ones and that overall there is almost twice as much exegesis in each volume produced after the war than there is in each written before or during the war.” Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis*, 31. See Christiana Baxter, “Barth-a Truly Biblical Theologian?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 38 (1987).

<sup>116</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, x.

<sup>117</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 129.

<sup>118</sup>In his recent *A Fellowship of Baptism*, Tracy Mark Stout appeals to Stanley Fowler’s assessment of Barth’s exegesis of texts relating to baptism, concluding that “Barth’s exegesis does not provide him with an adequate ground for his denial of baptism as sacrament. Tracey Mark Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism: Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology in Light of His Understanding of Baptism* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 80. See Stanley K. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol. The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 180–95.

Meyer has put it, “meticulous exegetical debate is precisely what is needed if we are to help one another ‘check the arbitrary exploitation of [scripture] passages to score points in theological controversy’.”<sup>119</sup> I engage in such debate regarding Barth’s doctrine of baptism, placing Barth’s exegetical moves in a broader scholarly context than is apparent in the critiques of Barth examined above. Critics such as Macken and Yocum have asserted that Barth’s reading of the Biblical texts are philosophically or dogmatically determined, appealing to a few New Testament scholars as authoritative witnesses against Barth’s reading of the Biblical texts. By contrast, I engage deeply both with the arguments Barth makes for his position and with the arguments of contemporary New Testament scholars surrounding the texts Barth addresses.

The aim of assessing the plausibility of Barth’s exegesis in conversation with New Testament scholarship is not only a response to the appeals made by others to New Testament scholars, but also arises naturally from Barth’s own exegetical practice. One could see this study as an attempt to flesh out the small-print exegetical excursus of Barth’s work in light of more recent scholarship.<sup>120</sup> That is, the focus of this study is not so much to evaluate Barth’s arguments in

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<sup>119</sup>Paul Meyer, “The Worm at the Core of the Apple,” in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. R.T. Formaand and B.R. Gaventa (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 62, quoted in J. Louis Martyn, “De-Apocalypticizing Paul: An Essay Focused on *Paul and the Stoics* by Troels Engberg-Pedersen,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 86 (2002): 96. Engberg-Pedersen responds to Martyn: Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Response to Martyn,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 86 (2002): 103–14. Debates among Biblical scholars, such as that between Engberg-Pederson and Martyn, show clearly why references to the judgment of a single Biblical scholar (for example Macken’s appeal to the work of Schlüter, or Yocum’s to Dinkler) do little to establish or dispel concerns that theological commitments have skewed Barth’s exegesis. New Testament scholars, no less than theologians, need to be reminded that “exegetical argument should be met with exegetical counter-arguments, not with airily dismissive references to preconceptions.” Francis Watson, “Response to Martyn and Engberg-Pedersen,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59, no. 4 (2006): 464.

<sup>120</sup>It must be admitted that, in contrast to earlier volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, the fragment contains relatively little direct engagement with contemporary literature. Barth accounts for this by noting that he has “been unable to find [in contemporary literature on baptism] anything which can be seriously followed up,” noting here an article by Erich Dinkler (Erich Dinkler, “Baptism,” in *Die Religion in Geshichte und Gegenwart, Dritte Auflage*, ed. Kurt Galling, et al. [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1957]). Given that the starting-point of his contemporaries is so different from his own, Barth chooses not to burden himself or his readers by debate with them, citing Goethe’s observation that the inside of the crater of Vesuvius offered him only an “unpleasant and not very instructive prospect.” Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, xii.

light of contemporary scholarship as it is an exploration of the extent to which a credible exegetical case can be made for Barth's doctrine of baptism.<sup>121</sup>

In setting out to assess the plausibility of Barth's doctrine of baptism as exegesis, this study has a very particular scope. It is not an assessment of Barth's doctrine of baptism, either in terms of its consistency with the *Church Dogmatics* more broadly or in terms of its systematic adequacy. It does not engage with the many theological and philosophical concerns that have been raised. Instead, this study takes up the frequent claim that there are serious problems with the exegetical grounding of Barth's doctrine and sets out to refute this claim.

This project assumes Barth's claim that the movement of his thought was from exegesis to dogmatics, and it also assumes that historical-critical engagement with the text is an essential step towards interpretation. Historical critical scholars have long been dismissive of Barth's exegesis. James Barr's criticism of Barth's exegesis as "wearisome, inept and futile," and Barth's theology as "at bottom a dogmatic philosophical system, in which the biblical exegetical foundation ... was logically incidental" is of a piece with the criticisms that met the first edition of Barth's *Römerbrief*.<sup>122</sup> In *What is Theological Exegesis?* Mary Cunningham observes that such criticisms rest on the assumption that "a historical-critical reading of the text is superior to Barth's style of theological exegesis on the grounds that the former is somehow more 'scientific' or 'objective' or 'impartial'." She argues that such criticisms fail "to acknowledge is that all exegetes approach the texts with presuppositions, interest, and goals," and suggests that "Barth's style of theological exegesis" and "historical-critical reading" are simply two "different approaches to finding 'meaning' in biblical texts."<sup>123</sup> Cunningham is clear that her intent is "not

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<sup>121</sup>It is important to note the scope of this study. It is not an assessment of Barth's exegesis as such. The texts and issues arise from Barth, and his exegetical moves will be discussed, but the question at issue is whether or not his conclusions are exegetically well-founded, not whether or not he has provided sufficient exegetical justification for his conclusions (In many cases he has not). But the fact that Barth's discussion has determined the texts and issues addressed means that this study is not a full discussion of baptism in the New Testament. It is also important to note that this is not an assessment of Barth's doctrine of baptism, either in terms of its consistency with the *Church Dogmatics* more broadly or in terms of its systematic adequacy.

<sup>122</sup>James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 203, 131.

<sup>123</sup>Mary Cunningham, *What is Theological Exegesis? Interpretation and Use of Scripture in Barth's Doctrine of Election* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 68.

to evaluate Barth's reading over against a historical-critical reading," but only "to identify the differing concerns that inform Barth's exegetical decisions and those of the historical critics."<sup>124</sup>

Such an approach might lead one to view historical-critical considerations as irrelevant to "Barth's style of theological exegesis."<sup>125</sup> More recently, however, Richard Burnett has noted the continuing importance of historical-criticism for Barth. Burnett insists that Barth clearly articulated his hermeneutical principles in the various editions of his *Römerbrief*, and that he "defended these principles throughout his career."<sup>126</sup> He argues that Barth's goal was always to avoid "arbitrary, idiosyncratic, privileged interpretation of the Bible," and that he did not reject

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<sup>124</sup>Cunningham, *What is Theological Exegesis?* 18.

<sup>125</sup>Timothy Gorringer also tends in this direction when he responds to Barr's criticism of Barth. Referring to the work of David Ford and David Kelsey, Gorringer suggests that Barth's narrative approach to Scripture "gives priority to imagination" as opposed to historical reconstruction. Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 284–85. See David Ford, *Barth and God's Story* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1985) and David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM, 1975), 48. It should be noted that Gorringer argues that this is not to dispense with historical details in the text, but rather to refuse to reduce the meaning of the texts to what can be discovered about them by historical reconstruction: "Barth approaches the diverse documents of Scripture as essentially an inspired, and therefore inspiring, stimulus for our imagination. That they are *theopneustos* does not mean that the reader can play fast and loose with them, but it does mean, first, that a unity across this diversity is presupposed, and secondly that a whole variety of readings, which may be playful and in earnest at the same time, and which often choose to stay with the surface of the text, are in order." Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 285. Of the various protests to Barr's treatment of Barth, Gorringer refers the reader to Anthony C. Thistleton, "Barr on Barth and Natural Theology: A Plea for Hermeneutics in Historical Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47 (1994): 519ff. Paul McGlasson has criticized Ford's characterization of Barth as a narrative theologian, arguing that "Barth's exegesis is ultimately and irreducibly *pluralistic* methodologically; a single category like narrative reading does not begin to comprehend and explain the enormous variety that one notices immediately upon reading the biblical exegesis in any volume of the *Church Dogmatics*.... *Secondly*, if one had to choose a single, explanatory interpretation of Barth, *conceptual analysis* would probably be a more likely candidate.... *Thirdly*, Ford ascribes to Barth a *unified view of narrative* that isn't there." Paul McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 8–9.

<sup>126</sup>Burnett's project is directed against the tendency among some, such as Cunningham and McGlasson, to see Barth as a post-modern or post-critical thinker who eschewed hermeneutics in favour of an *ad-hoc* approach to specific exegetical questions. So Paul McGlasson suggests that "the best way to come to grips with Barth's possible contribution to contemporary theological hermeneutics is to focus on his actual biblical exegesis, rather than the less clear contours of his few hermeneutical statements." McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas*, 2. While acknowledging that Barth moved from the particular to the general and was unsystematic in the sense that his thought was not governed by an over-arching system, Burnett insists that his hermeneutics was not simply *ad hoc*. Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, 5.

or dismiss the hermeneutical tradition of Schleiermacher and historical-criticism.<sup>127</sup> However, Burnett argues that one of Barth's criticisms of historical criticism was that it was not sufficiently self-critical: "It did not recognize the relativity of its judgments or of historical understanding in general. In the name of scientific objectivity it presumed to take up a position of unprejudiced, nonparticipatory observation outside or above history even though its judgments were often highly prejudiced and speculative."<sup>128</sup> And furthermore, Barth viewed historical criticism as tending to reductionism, to piling up information and historical data without giving an explication of the text.<sup>129</sup>

Thus, Barth did not seek to set aside the results of historical criticism, but saw them as only a necessary preparation for understanding.<sup>130</sup> Burnett notes that, for Barth, the value of historical criticism for constructing a picture of the concrete historical situation out of which a text arose was not to be underestimated, even if he insisted caution is called for and that interpreters not make idols out of their conjectures. Such pictures are always formed when a reader approaches a text and the question is whether they are appropriate or not. Historical critical tools can help to

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<sup>127</sup>Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, 53–54. Burnett notes that a lack of attention to Barth's hermeneutics has contributed to the dismissal of Barth's exegesis as arising from Barth's "creativity and genius," as a "virtuoso performance" which cannot be duplicated. By contrast, Burnett insists that "if Barth's exegesis was essentially a 'virtuoso performance,' something having more to do with his own creativity and genius than with what Scripture actually says, then his theology - on the basis of his own presuppositions and standards - will not stand. Barth insisted throughout his career that his move had been first to the Bible and then to dogma, but if this first move began with exegesis which was essentially ill-founded or merely the product of his own idiosyncratic insights, then his entire theology - again, by its own presuppositions and standards - can hardly be judged as anything else but a 'false start'." Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, 9–10.

<sup>128</sup>Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, 230.

<sup>129</sup>Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, 84.

<sup>130</sup>Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, 231. Donald Wood makes a similar argument, suggesting that, for Barth, "the historical-critical method of biblical research has its place; it points to a preparation for understanding that is never superfluous." Donald Wood, *Barth's Theology of Interpretation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 12–13.

remove “inappropriate and unwarranted conjectures and constructions” that a reader might bring to the Biblical text.<sup>131</sup>

The present attempt to engage seriously with exegetical arguments within the context of a theological proposal concerning sacraments was inspired in part by the work of Doug Harink, and the comments with which he introduces his *Paul among the Postliberals* apply also to some extent to this dissertation:

I’ll be the first to say that this is an odd book. It claims to be a book on Paul. It draws heavily on recent biblical studies in Paul; yet it is not a work of biblical studies in the usual guild sense of the term. I am proposing no new paradigms for understanding the apostle, or am I breaking new ground in reading his texts and contexts. Apart from continuing to read Paul’s texts closely and carefully, I am largely dependent on the work of others who have done all those things.<sup>132</sup>

So, too, this dissertation draws heavily upon the biblical scholarship of others. One of the challenges to such engagement is the vast amount of New Testament scholarship available. Given the wide range of texts and issues under consideration, and the vast quantity of Biblical

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<sup>131</sup>Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis*, 235. Noting that while biblical scholars criticize theologians for misusing biblical texts and theologians dismiss biblical scholarship as too technical, irrelevant, and insufficiently theologically aware, Maico Michielin suggests that Barth “is an excellent resource to help bridge the ever-widening gap that exists between biblical scholars and theologians in the academy.” Maico Michielin, “Karl Barth’s Exegesis in *Philippians* and *Shorter Romans*: An Exegesis That Corresponds to God’s Activity,” Unpublished Dissertation (Toronto: Wycliffe College, 2004), 244–45. See also Maico Michielin, “Bridging the Gulf Between Biblical Scholars and Theologians: Can Barth and Wright Provide an Answer,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 4 (2008): 420–34. Paul McGlasson articulates a similar diagnosis for the lack of serious exegetical engagement with Barth: “On the one hand, professional theologians more recently have not for the most part concerned themselves professionally with technical, extended, exegetical production. And on the other hand, professional biblical scholars have not concerned themselves with an exegetical production that falls entirely outside the normative exegetical approach in modern times. The result is that, for scholars of theology, the work is too ‘biblical,’ while for scholars of the Bible the work is too ‘theological.’ The resulting fate of Barth’s biblical exegesis is in a way not really surprising.” McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas*, 4.

<sup>132</sup>Douglas Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 13.

scholarship available, it has been necessary to be selective rather than exhaustive. One factor in the selection of conversation partners has been to focus on recent scholarship, primarily but not exclusively from the 1990s onwards. Such a focus is guided by my interest in engaging Barth in conversation with contemporary New Testament scholarship rather than in evaluating his relationship with the New Testament scholarship of his own time.

A second factor in the selection of conversation partners has been an attention to commentaries and longer works which consider particular texts and issues within a relatively broad context. Thirdly, and most importantly, selection of conversation partners has been guided by the issues and questions at hand. For each of the focal issues or texts addressed in subsequent chapters I have identified a range of perspectives and consider the arguments made concerning the issue at hand from each of these perspectives. Where there are a number of scholars with a similar perspective on an issue or text, I have picked one or two exemplars of that perspective, giving preference to those with the clearest argumentation. In general, attention is given to those who articulate arguments in favour of their interpretations over those who simply offer an interpretation or perspective without much in the way of argument.

While a selective rather than exhaustive discussion of the issues at hand leaves open the possibility of bias in the selection of conversation partners, the range of conversation partners with which I engage is sufficient to assess the plausibility of Barth's exegesis and to demonstrate that a credible exegetical case can be made for Barth's doctrine of baptism.



## 2 Summary of Barth's doctrine of Baptism

What is Barth's doctrine of baptism? The present chapter intends to answer this question, outlining the argument that Barth makes in the baptism fragment. This chapter is almost purely descriptive, following the course of Barth's argument with minimal discussion. Barth's exegesis is mentioned at various points in the course of this description, but critical engagement with this exegesis will wait until subsequent chapters.

Barth's discussion of baptism in the baptism fragment is divided into two main sections. The first of these, "Baptism with the Holy Spirit," discusses baptism with the Holy Spirit as a divine act which sets the Christian life in motion, while the second, "Baptism with water," discusses baptism with water as a human response which bears witness to and responds to baptism with the Holy Spirit.

### 2.1 Baptism with the Holy Spirit as the beginning of the Christian life

A person's turning to faithfulness to God, and consequently to calling upon him, is the work of this faithful God which, perfectly accomplished in the history of Jesus Christ, in virtue of the awakening, quickening and illuminating power of this history, becomes a new beginning of life as his baptism with the Holy Spirit.<sup>133</sup>

#### 2.1.1 The divine beginning of human faithfulness

Barth's discussion of baptism with the Holy Spirit begins by addressing the question of how the Christian life begins: What is its foundation? What sets it in motion? Barth outlines his answer to these questions already in the theme-sentence quoted above. Here Barth describes a person's calling on God as already a work of human faithfulness, as already an act of obedience. For

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<sup>133</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 2.

Barth, calling upon God is not the beginning, but is already a consequence of a person's turning from unfaithfulness to faithfulness. And this turning is the work of the faithful God.

How does God accomplish this turning? Having already described the history of Jesus Christ as the history of human faithfulness in the previous volumes of his *Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Barth's theme sentence explains that the turning of human unfaithfulness to faithfulness has been perfectly accomplished in the history of Jesus Christ.<sup>134</sup> The question for the baptism fragment is how the history of Jesus Christ, his being and work *extra nos, pro nobis*, becomes an event *in nobis*, an event of the turning to faithfulness of particular human persons. Barth's discussion of baptism with the Holy Spirit unpacks his understanding that, by virtue of the Resurrection, the history of Jesus Christ has an awakening and illuminating power such that the history of Jesus becomes a new beginning of life in a person. This new beginning of life, Christ in them, is their baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Barth's starting point for his discussion is the conviction that human faithfulness is a mystery and miracle which cannot be accounted for in human terms. Being outside the realm of human possibility, faithfulness is something genuinely new in a person's life whereby a person lives with "a new character in which he is strange to himself and his fellows." That such faithfulness occurs is cause for "helpless astonishment."<sup>135</sup> Making reference to Jesus' statement that that which is otherwise impossible is possible with God,<sup>136</sup> Barth suggests that God brings human faithfulness into existence, giving a person a new character, the power of the kingdom of God coming with "actuality into the sphere of a person's being, life, thought and action."<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> See especially *CD IV/1* and *IV/2*.

<sup>135</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 3.

<sup>136</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 4. Barth discusses Mark 10.24, where Jesus assures his astonished disciples that, though it is harder for a person to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, "with God all things are possible."

<sup>137</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 3.

### 2.1.2 Faithfulness that is genuinely human

If Barth insists that the activity of God is the beginning of human faithfulness, he is equally insistent that the faithfulness brought about is *human* faithfulness. That which is only a divine possibility becomes a human action, the human person becoming the subject of this event of faith, love and hope in God, “a person who wills and acts in this positive relation to God.”<sup>138</sup>

Barth contrasts this understanding of the beginning of human faithfulness with three traditional approaches, each of which are only partial.<sup>139</sup> Encompassing and surpassing notions of imputed righteousness, awakening of human potential, or infusion of supernatural power, Barth suggests, is Scripture’s witness “to the change which comes on a person themselves” when the gracious God freely draws and turns a person so that they themselves choose to become a faithful covenant partner with God.<sup>140</sup> While the beginning of the Christian life is the act of God drawing and turning which changes a person, the Christian life itself is the person themselves choosing to become a faithful covenant partner with God.

### 2.1.3 Four scriptural images of the beginning of the Christian life

Barth provides exegetical support for his understanding of the beginning of Christian life in an excursus addressing four different but converging ways in which Scripture speaks of the divine turning which is the beginning of Christian life: i) Christian life is a new garment which a person puts on, and in doing so becomes the bearer of this garment; ii) Christian life is a new or circumcised heart whereby a person is inwardly a new person; iii) Christian life is a new generation or birth which subsequent and transcends natural birth in new creation; iv) Christian

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<sup>138</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 4.

<sup>139</sup>In contrast to traditional Protestant notions of imputed righteousness, Barth insists that there is a real becoming new of the human person. The Christian life is not simply an external and forensic imputation of faithfulness to a person. Also rejecting liberal or pelagian notions of the awakening of a person’s moral or religious power or potential, Barth insists that natural moral and religious potential is insufficient to account for Christian faithfulness. The Christian life is, according to Barth, not a possibility even for a moral or religious titan. Furthermore, Barth argues that the popular Roman Catholic notion of infused supernatural powers or abilities does not go far enough because it fails to account for the need to change the subject, the person, who would make use of such powers or abilities.

<sup>140</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 5–6.

life is a passage through death to resurrection whereby the old is past and the Christian can go forward in freedom. He argues that each of these ways of speaking about Christian life imply that Christian life is a real change in a person, and a change that goes beyond the awakening of human potential, and even beyond the infusion of supernatural potential, but rather involves a radical change at the core of the person themselves.

With regard to the first image, that of a new garment which a person puts on and becomes the bearer of, some of the texts Barth cites the parable of the wedding garment in Matthew 22.1-4 and the references to the saints as wearing white robes in Revelation, as well as Ephesians 4.24, Colossians 3.10, Romans 7.22, Ephesians 3.16, 2 Corinthians 4.16 and 1 Peter 3.4 - texts which speak of clothing oneself with a new self.<sup>141</sup>

Barth's discussion of the second image, that of a new or circumcised heart by which "a man is inwardly" a new person, centers around Romans 2. Opposing the traditional interpretation of this passage as having to do with outstanding Gentiles, Barth suggests that when Paul speaks of Gentiles having the works of the law (*ἔργον τοῦ νόμου*) written on their heart, he is describing Gentiles within the Christian community.<sup>142</sup> According to Barth, Paul's point is that the promises of Jeremiah 31.33f, Jeremiah 32.29, Ezekiel 11.19 and Deuteronomy 30.6 are being fulfilled among Gentile Christians: It is as Christians that they are those whose hearts have been changed, who have the works of the law written on their hearts, who have hearts of flesh, circumcised hearts.<sup>143</sup> Noting that "according to biblical usage" the heart is the centre of the life of a person

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<sup>141</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 7. While the Matthew and Revelations texts may fall short of Barth's point, the Pauline texts, such as Ephesians 4.24 and Colossians 3.10, as well as his reference to 1 Peter 3.4 appear to support him. I will not go into details on these texts primarily because they are not areas of his exegesis that have been challenged. If Barth began his discussion of the newness which the Christian has put on with these Pauline texts, his references to Revelations and the parable of the wedding garment would be more convincing.

<sup>142</sup>"That the reference is indeed to Gentile Christians, and has nothing whatever to do with natural theology, is plain once one grasps the obvious point that Paul is here describing the strange fulfillment of the radiant Old Testament promise of the future establishment of a completely renewed Israel which is awakened to obedience to God and empowered and ready to keep his commandments." Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 8.

<sup>143</sup>Barth explicitly recognizes that his is a departure from "an ancient and almost universally accepted exegetical tradition", noting, however, that it is "not a tradition which is to be respected merely on this account". Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 8.

“in which a person is inwardly what they are,” for a person to acquire a new heart “means that he himself, in so far as this has a decisive bearing on his whole being and act, becomes another person.”<sup>144</sup>

Barth makes reference to a wide range of passages in support of his third scriptural image, that of new generation or birth. This new generation or re-birth is received from God and is a total renewal of the person: Barth notes that the word used for rebirth in Titus 3.5 (*παλιγγενεσία*) is the same as that which appears in Matthew 19.28 in connection with the renewal of the world. With supplementary reference to other texts, Barth’s main argument is rooted in John’s Gospel, where Nicodemus attempts to grasp the “mystery and miracle of divine sonship.” Barth refers to the statement in John 1.13 that the children of God are born “not of blood or of the will of the flesh or the will of man, but of God” to support his contention that when a person “becomes a Christian, his natural origin in the procreative will of his human father is absolutely superseded and transcended.” While flesh gives birth to flesh (John 3.3), the Christian is born *ἄνωθεν*, “not on the horizontal plane of the sequence of generations, but on the vertical plane of direct divine fatherhood.” They are born of the Spirit, of God, “who can and does raise up children to Abraham from these stones (Mt 3.9).”<sup>145</sup> Barth further suggests that this Johannine theme is paralleled in Paul’s language of “new creature” (Galatians 6.15, 2 Corinthians 5.17), concluding that “the Christian life begins with a change which cannot be understood or described radically enough,” and which God effects in a person’s life “in a way which is decisive for his whole being and action.”<sup>146</sup>

Barth notes that the final scriptural image, that of the origin of the Christian life as a passage through death to new life, reveals “how sharp and inconceivable this change is.” In expanding

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<sup>144</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 8. This scriptural image makes Barth’s point concerning the total nature of the change involved in becoming a Christian, a change which goes beyond the bestowal of powers or abilities to a change in the person themselves, much more successfully than the image of new garments. His attempts to make the Revelations passages referred to above say this, in particular, seem forced.

<sup>145</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 9. The supplementary references which Barth makes in this section are to 1 John 4.7; 5.1; 1 Peter 1.3, 23; 2.2; Mark 10.15; James 1.18; 1 Corinthians 15.45.

<sup>146</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 9.

upon this point, Barth draws particularly upon Pauline passages (Galatians 2.19f; 2 Corinthians 4.10; Romans 6; Colossians 3.3; 2 Timothy 2.11), but also Johannine texts (John 5.24; 1 John 3.14).<sup>147</sup>

Furthermore, Barth argues that the newness that comes into a person's life is none other than Jesus Christ, revisiting each of the Scriptural images in another excursus in order to demonstrate that the history of Jesus Christ "is the reality of the new beginning which is at issue in all of them."<sup>148</sup> The new garment which the Christian has put on is Christ himself.<sup>149</sup> The new heart which a Christian receives is one on which Christ's law is written, in which Christ dwells, so that they have new hearts that "become and are the centers of a life which is to be lived anew," Christ's death being the circumcision whereby they received these new hearts.<sup>150</sup>

With respect to the image of new birth and begetting, Barth returns to the Gospel of John, noting that in it "the *ἐξουσία* with which people become the children of God" comes from the one to whom John the Baptist bore witness.<sup>151</sup> The new life of the Christian comes from and is the life of Christ, the life-giving Spirit whose resurrection gives new birth to a living hope.<sup>152</sup> A person who is in Christ is a new creation, God having poured out his Spirit to regenerate and renew through Christ.<sup>153</sup> Therefore the new birth and begetting of the Christian is that of Christ, and his

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<sup>147</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 9.

<sup>148</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 14.

<sup>149</sup>Gal. 3.27 and Romans 13.14.

<sup>150</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 14. See Gal 6.2; 1 Cor 2.16; Eph 3.17; Col 2.1.

<sup>151</sup>"The completely unexpected christological turn of the conversation with Nicodemus points in this direction." Thus, while the interpretation of *ἄνωθεν* in John 3.3 points first of all to birth *ἐκ πνεύματος*, the conversation abruptly shifts: "The coming of the Son of Man from heaven, and on earth his exaltation on the cross (compared to the lifting up of the brazen serpent), are described as the event... in virtue of which those who believe in him will have eternal life in him." Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 15.

<sup>152</sup>1 Cor 15.46; 1 Peter 1.3.

<sup>153</sup>2 Cor 5.17; Titus 3.5f.

birth is their new birth: “It is true exegesis, not eisegesis, to say that nativity of Christ is the nativity of the Christian person; Christmas Day is the birthday of every Christian.”<sup>154</sup>

Finally, Barth notes that in the New Testament it is the death of Christ that leads to life for many, rather than that death as such leading to life.<sup>155</sup> Barth understands Christ’s life from his baptism by John to his death on Golgotha to be a subjecting of himself to the judgment of God “in solidarity and even in identification with all.”<sup>156</sup> In being baptized “with them and like them” Jesus entered his Messianic office, and “here began the discharge of this office which was completed on the cross of Golgotha.”

Barth points to Luke 12.50 as the exegetical basis for this connection between the baptism and the death of Jesus, noting that Mark 10.35-40 makes clear that this baptism of death includes that of the disciples also: “Jesus does not drink from that cup for himself alone. He is not baptized with that baptism in isolation. This takes place in their stead and for them.” Noting that scripture speaks in various ways of death’s connection with sin, Barth notes also the various ways in which Scripture speaks of Christ as solving the problem of sin and death, concluding that the result of Christ’s death is that “we ourselves neither must nor can die the death which we ought to die as sinners.”<sup>157</sup> The sufficiency of Christ’s death leaves no room for our own death because

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<sup>154</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 15.

<sup>155</sup>Barth draws an immediate connection between Christ’s death and baptism by his interpretation of Jesus’ baptism by John. Barth argues that Jesus’ baptism by John is a fulfilling of all righteousness (Matt 3.15) because in this act Jesus subjected himself to the divine judgment proclaimed by John “in solidarity and even in identification with all.” For Barth, this subjecting himself to the righteous judgment of God in baptism marks the beginning of that of which his crucifixion is the end. See discussion in chapter 3 of Jesus’ baptism by John.

<sup>156</sup>This is the fulfilling of all righteousness (Matt 3.15). Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 15.

<sup>157</sup>Christ died for our sins (1 Cor 15.3); he bore our sins on the tree (1 Pet. 2.24); he is the Lamb of God who bears and bears away the sin of the world (Jn 1.29); he gave his life a ransom for many slaves (Mk 10.45 par); he was made sin for us (2 Cor 5.21) and died the “accursed death of sinners on the cross” (Gal 3.13); he died this death for us (1 Thess 5.10). Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 16.

we are all already crucified with him.<sup>158</sup> In Barth's view the appropriation of the crucifixion in the obedience of faith now and here is a *consequence* of dying with him, which itself took place then and there when Jesus died.<sup>159</sup> Summing up, Barth concludes:

In the history of Jesus Christ, then, is the origin and beginning of the Christian life, the divine change in which the impossible thing that there is movement *ἐκ πίστεως*, from the depth and power of the faithfulness of God, *εἰς πίστιν*, to the corresponding faithfulness of human persons (Rom 1.17), is not only possible but actual. The witness of the New Testament is so definite in this respect that there can be no evading this statement, and it is so unequivocal that no demythologising or reinterpretation of the statement is possible.<sup>160</sup>

#### 2.1.4 The faithfulness of Jesus Christ

For Barth, then, the Christian life began when Jesus Christ responded to God's faithfulness with human faithfulness. Barth suggests that this sets Christianity apart from other religious or philosophical conceptions of newness and self-transcendence, noting that the seemingly obscure, absurd, and even offensive foundation of the Christian life is God's free activity in the history of Jesus Christ, who, as the one elected from eternity to be the Saviour of all, "in time responded to God's faithfulness with human faithfulness as the Representative of all... the change which took

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<sup>158</sup>In fact, our own death has already taken place: "With him Paul (Gal 2.19) who was once Saul, and indeed each of us (as the *πάλαιός ἄνθρωπος* we all were and are, Rom. 6.8) is crucified - with Him the two thieves, the impenitent no less than the penitent (Lk. 23. 39ff)." Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 16.

<sup>159</sup>"At a time when they were still enemies (Rom 5.10) and there could be no question of the obedience of faith...Their saving death took place, not now and here, but in supreme actuality then and there," when Christ died and they died in and with him: "More accurately, it took place now and here inasmuch as it took place then and there." Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 17.

<sup>160</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 17.



place in his history took place for all. *In it the turning of all from unfaithfulness to faithfulness took place.*<sup>161</sup>

One might ask, however, what Barth means in stating that the turning of *all* from unfaithfulness to faithfulness took place. Does this imply that all humans are Christians? The question of Barth's universalism is complex.<sup>162</sup> Suffice it to say at this point that a differentiation might be made between the reconciliation of all to God in Christ, and particular persons being Christian. For Barth, the defining thing of being a Christian is not that one has been reconciled to God, but that one knows and responds to God's work of reconciliation. While the history of all persons took place along with the history of Jesus Christ, a Christian "is a person from whom it is not hidden that their own history took place along with the history of Jesus Christ."<sup>163</sup> And this is knowledge that leads to action. Seeing their history taking place along with the history of Jesus Christ, the Christian understands them self "as one of those for whom and in whose place Jesus did what he did."<sup>164</sup> For a particular person to be Christian, Christ's work *extra nos, pro nobis* must become an event *in nobis*. Insisting that how it is that this happens, that that which he was and did then and there becomes an event *in nobis*, is a mystery that cannot be dispelled, Barth's subsequent discussion is his attempt to explain and clarify this mystery.

### 2.1.5 Clarifying the twofold structure of the beginning of the Christian life

First seeking to clarify the structure of the event of the beginning of the Christian life, Barth rules out both christomonist and anthropomonist solutions. He suggests that christomonist solutions, where Jesus is the only acting subject, are inadequate because they make human persons only passive participants in that which God did in Christ, anthropology and soteriology being swallowed up by christology. Barth also rejects anthropomonist solutions, where Jesus history is

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<sup>161</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 13.

<sup>162</sup>On the question of Barth and universalism, see George Hunsinger, "Hellfire and Damnation: Four Ancient and Modern Views," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 226–52 and Tom Greggs, "'Jesus is Victor': Passing the Impasse of Barth on Universalism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 2 (2007): 196–212.

<sup>163</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 13.

<sup>164</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 13–14.

understood as a particular instance of something that happens in human persons more generally, because here Jesus is only a stimulation, instruction, or aid to what we can and should do, christology being swallowed up by a self-sufficient anthropology and soteriology.

Noting that both of these types of solutions conjure away the mystery, Barth asserts that the New Testament envisions a two-sided mystery. One side of the mystery is a movement from above downwards which excludes anthropomorphism because it is *God* who introduces a new beginning for every human person. The history of Jesus Christ is the “history of the salvation which God in His free grace has ascribed, addressed and granted to all,” and so is “a particular story with a universal goal and basis.”<sup>165</sup> The beginning of the Christian life is the history of Jesus such that Christian life follows, and so should correspond to, “the divine transformation of the Christian’s heart and person” in the history of Jesus Christ.<sup>166</sup>

The other side of the mystery excludes christomonism because that which is posited by God in Christ is the beginning of *human* faithfulness, of “a person who is faithful to God.” Barth argues that, while there is no direct relation between God and humans, God creates and adopts such a relation in Jesus Christ, such that God is “now present to us, not at a distance, but in the closest proximity, confronting us in our own being, thought and reflection.”<sup>167</sup> And because it is the faithful God who creates and adopts this relation, there is set “in our heart, at the centre of our existence” a contradiction of human unfaithfulness which opens up a new possibility of faithfulness.

For Barth it is of primary importance that the particular history of Jesus Christ is a universal history that does not replace, but sets in motion and makes possible other histories of faithfulness: The divine change

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<sup>165</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 20–21. Christ is able to “introduce a new being of every man,” to be faithful to God not only then and there, for himself and his contemporaries, but also here and now.

<sup>166</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 21.

<sup>167</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 22.

comes upon a person wholly from without, from God. Nevertheless, it is *their* liberation. The point is that here, as everywhere, the omnicausality of God must not be construed as his sole causality. The divine change in whose accomplishment a man becomes a Christian is an event of true intercourse between God and man. If it undoubtedly has its origin in God's initiative, *no less indisputably man is not ignored or passed over in it*. He is taken seriously as an independent creature of God. He is not run down and overpowered, but set on his own two feet. He is not put under tutelage, but addressed and treated as an adult. The history of Jesus Christ, then, does not destroy a man's own history. In virtue of it this history becomes *a new history, but it is still his own new history*.<sup>168</sup>

John Webster notes that in this important passage we see Barth's emphasis on the reality of human agency particularly clearly. For Barth, Christ's history is not only substitutionary, but is fruitful, "evocative of other histories."<sup>169</sup> While he insists that human liberation comes "wholly from without," it is nonetheless the liberation of the human.<sup>170</sup> Barth is concerned about a kind of docetism where human action only seems to be human, but is actually swallowed up by the divine.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 22–23.

<sup>169</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 138.

<sup>170</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 139.

<sup>171</sup>See *Karl Barth, CD IV/4*, 105. Webster's *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* is focused particularly on the question of Barth's account of human agency. Over against critics of Barth such as Roberts or Macken, Webster argues that Barth's *Dogmatics* is "among other things, a moral ontology - an extensive account of the situation in which human agents act." Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 1. Webster suggests that, as an account which focuses on the space which moral agents occupy rather than on the character of the agents themselves, Barth presents an "account of the moral life as genuine action in analogy to prior divine action." Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 2.

### 2.1.6 The power of the Resurrection and of the Holy Spirit

Having explored the two-fold structure of the beginning of the Christian life, Barth turns his attention to “two inseparable but distinguishable factors in whose power the event takes place,”<sup>172</sup> these being the Resurrection and the Holy Spirit. Here we see that, as Webster has noted, “language about the Spirit constitutes for Barth not only a necessary, but also a sufficient explanation of how it is that Christian life comes to be.” Because of the immediate presence of the living Jesus Christ in the Spirit, Barth has no need for any “supplementary theory of how the objective is mediated to the human historical existence - whether the theory be an anthropology, a phenomenology of sacramental signs, or a philosophical hermeneutics.”<sup>173</sup>

The first factor in whose power the beginning of the Christian life takes place is that of the Resurrection. In light of the Resurrection “the divine change effected in the history of Jesus Christ” from Bethlehem to Golgotha becomes “the concrete and dynamic relation between God and man, the event of the foundation of the Christian life.”<sup>174</sup> This is because, for Barth, it is the Resurrection which is “the beginning of the manifestation of what [Jesus] was and did perfectly there and then,”<sup>175</sup> the manifestation of “the triumph of his temporal, spatial and personal life” over death, so that Christ becomes a living Word of salvation “which does in fact reach all and may be reached by all.” Although it is from and to all eternity that Jesus Christ was “integrated into human existence as it was integrated into his existence,” Jesus Christ is “present for, with, and in every man” in his human history, rather than statically.<sup>176</sup>

The second factor in whose power the beginning of the Christian life takes place is that of the work of the Holy Spirit. That the history of Jesus Christ from Bethlehem to Golgotha becomes the event of the renewing of certain people, enabling, permitting, and ordering them “to become

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<sup>172</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 23.

<sup>173</sup>Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 146.

<sup>174</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 26.

<sup>175</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 24.

<sup>176</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 25.

responsible subjects of their own human history,” is the work of the Holy Spirit in whose work that which was truth for him “becomes truth which is affirmed by him.”<sup>177</sup> Barth insists that this work of the Spirit fully establishes the human covenant partner in their humanity, rather than altering their humanity to be divine, semi-divine, “organized or equipped differently.”<sup>178</sup> Rather than a deification, one might speak of a normalization or humanization of the person, for it is in their humanity that are elected by God: The Spirit establishes the person in their human spirit, mind, knowledge and will, setting them on their feet.<sup>179</sup> Summing up his discussion of the divine change which is the foundation of the Christian life, Barth suggest that this work of the Spirit in bringing about human faithfulness is the baptism with the Holy Spirit.<sup>180</sup>

### 2.1.7 Baptism with the Holy Spirit

Barth suggests that all that he has said up to this point in his argument can be described as Baptism with the Holy Spirit. He discusses this use of “baptism with the Holy Spirit” in a relatively brief excursus. Acknowledging that he has taken “a certain exegetical liberty” in using the concept of baptism with the Holy Spirit to describe “the act of God which is constitutive for the beginning of the Christian life,” he argues that this move is “not without solid foundation.”<sup>181</sup> While the narratives in Acts which portray the fulfillment of John’s promise of a coming baptism with the Spirit seem to be oriented towards the appointing and equipping of people to be witnesses to Jesus Christ rather than towards the beginning of their Christian lives, Barth suggests that because the ministry of witness “forms the meaning and scope of the whole of the Christian life,” the work of the Holy Spirit in making persons “free, able, willing and ready for this ministry” is the founding of the Christian life. As Barth sees it, preparing persons to bear witness is one concrete form of the more general work of bringing about the beginning of Christian life in them.

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<sup>177</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 26–28.

<sup>178</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 28.

<sup>179</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 28.

<sup>180</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 30.

<sup>181</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 30–31. This short, but crucial, excursus is addressed more fully in chapter 3.

Thus, while some texts speak of the concrete result of the work of the Spirit in a person in terms of repentance and forgiveness, and others speak in terms of appointing and equipping for ministry, Barth suggests that these are two concrete forms that the work of the Spirit in bringing about Christian life takes. Both are always present, but in some contexts one or other of these concrete forms will be explicit and in others it may be only implicit. While the Spirit's salvific work is sometimes the focus, this work is implicitly directed towards witness, just as when "the ministry of witness holds the stage as the meaning and scope of the Christian life, and hence also of baptism with the Spirit which founds it, one has necessarily and tacitly to supply the presupposition that those who are called to this ministry and equipped for it can only be, and must become, people who are awakened to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and summoned to conversion in view of his coming, and to life with him."<sup>182</sup> One might sum this up by saying that, for Barth, the Spirit's work of salvation is always directed towards vocation, even as the Spirit's empowering for vocation always presupposes the Spirit's work of salvation.

Barth draws his discussion of the beginning of the Christian life to a close by offering five points clarifying his understanding of baptism with the Spirit as the divine foundation of the Christian life, differentiating it from the baptism with water as the human side of the beginning of the Christian life.

Barth's first point is that baptism with the Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ giving himself to a person, the "direct self-attestation and self-impartation of the living Jesus Christ."<sup>183</sup> For Barth, the one work of reconciliation includes the history of Jesus Christ, the manifestation of that history in the Resurrection, and the entering of that history into the life of individuals. The beginning of the Christian life is Jesus Christ entering the life of a person, bringing about a change in the person "in which a person in virtue of God's faithfulness to them becomes faithful to God in return, and thus becomes a Christian."<sup>184</sup> This entering of Jesus Christ into a person's life is their baptism with the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>182</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 31.

<sup>183</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 31

<sup>184</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 33.

For Barth, baptism with the Holy Spirit is not a salvific work that stands alongside the history of Jesus Christ, but it is the history of Jesus Christ reaching its goal. As Webster puts it, for Barth baptism with the Spirit is an “internal component of the perfect work of Christ.” It is “not a subsequent activity of an entirely separate divine agent,” but it is part of Christ’s action.<sup>185</sup> Appearing to negate any distinction between the agency of the Spirit and of Christ, Barth states that “the work of the Holy Spirit is again Jesus Christ himself creating access and entry in a specific person as the Lord of all and consequently as his Lord.”<sup>186</sup>

If baptism with the Spirit is not a work of the Spirit alongside the work of Christ, neither is it a work of the community.<sup>187</sup> Evidencing a concern that the Church has tended to make too much of its role in the beginning of the Christian life, Barth insists that “the Church is neither author, dispenser, nor mediator of grace and its revelation.”<sup>188</sup> At the same time Barth affirms the importance of the community. When a person is liberated by the work of the Spirit they are thereby “associated with all others who have been similarly awakened to faithfulness to God and with whom he finds himself set in God’s service as His witness in the world,” and so are called to community.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, the Church has an important, if modest, role as witness. It is through the life, speech and action of Christians, of the community that a person learns what it is to be a Christian. While the community does not itself initiate or bring about the divine change that is itself the beginning of the Christian life, as an “assistant and minister” to the work of the Spirit, the works and words of the community “accompany, expound and illumine” the one work and word of Christ himself.<sup>190</sup> But because baptism with the Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ giving

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<sup>185</sup>Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 141.

<sup>186</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 33.

<sup>187</sup>Barth insists that Christ “neither needs nor will he tolerate other factors or redeemers in this work of his. There is no place for such. He does not delegate his work to other factors, not even to his community.” Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 33.

<sup>188</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 32.

<sup>189</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 29.

<sup>190</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 32.

himself, a person owes their being as a Christian to Jesus Christ alone rather than to the community.

If a person does not owe their being as a Christian to the Church, neither do they owe it to themselves and their own decision. While becoming a Christian involves human decision, Barth understands this decision to follow rather than precede baptism with the Spirit. It is baptism with the Spirit, the divine change which turns a person from unfaithfulness to faithfulness, whereby a person is “freed and summoned” to respond with human faithfulness. Appealing to the distinction between the work of the human Baptist and that of the Stronger One to whom the Baptist pointed, Barth insists on the distinction: A person “becomes a Christian *in* his human decision, in the fact that he requests and receives baptism with water. But he does not become a Christian *through* his human decision or his water baptism.”<sup>191</sup>

Barth’s second point of clarification is that, as the self-attestation and self-impartation of Jesus Christ, baptism with the Spirit is an “effective, causative, even creative action” on a person and in a person. Baptism with the Spirit is not simply an offer or opportunity, a potential that a person must then actualize or realize, but is instead the cleansing and renewal of a person “truly and totally.”<sup>192</sup> As the grace of God addressed to a specific person, it is complete and effective.<sup>193</sup> Human decision cannot contribute anything to this grace but can only confirm, attest and indicate it. Neither can subsequent human decision negate baptism with the Spirit as an event in which a person receives a new being by virtue of Christ’s presence in them and with them. Barth argues that, while the person baptized with the Spirit is liberated and empowered for faithfulness and obedience, their “true and actual being” as one baptized with the Spirit “cannot be negated or even diminished” by their unfaithfulness or disobedience.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 32

<sup>192</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 34.

<sup>193</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 35.

<sup>194</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 35.



That baptism with the Holy Spirit both liberates and calls a person to obedience is Barth's third point, Barth explaining that a person baptized with the Spirit "is set directly before and under God's command, and claimed directly for its fulfillment."<sup>195</sup> They are freed from "the nexus of sin, guilt, and death as the power which binds all things," being liberated and called to obedience even in the midst of their weakness and impotence. Being beset by God, one so baptized cannot escape the claim God makes upon them through any appeal, even an appeal to their own freedom of choice and self-determination.<sup>196</sup>

However, while the only true exercise of the freedom granted by God is that of obedience, Barth insists that such obedience is not a mechanical consequence of being beset by God. It involves a person's own free decision, "a walking genuinely on his own feet as he is thus beset by God." As in his discussion of how the history of Jesus Christ is evocative of other histories, so here Barth emphasizes that the change which Jesus brings about in a person sets the stage for human decision and action. The person baptized by the Spirit does not become "a cog set in motion," but is taken seriously "as the creature which is different from God, which is, for all its dependence, autonomous before him.... Here she is empowered for her own act, and invited, commanded and encouraged to perform it."<sup>197</sup> For a person baptized with the Spirit to decide otherwise is not an exercise of their freedom but a refusal of it.

Fourthly, Barth also touches on the ecclesial aspects of baptism with the Spirit, noting that the beginning of the Christian life is the beginning of a person's life "in a distinctive fellow-humanity."<sup>198</sup> Someone who has been baptized with the Spirit to be inextricably bound to all others to whom Christ has given himself, including those with whom they otherwise may have little in common. They are freed from isolation, but also from all other contingent or transient

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<sup>195</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 36.

<sup>196</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 36. Being beset by God, "the only way is that of the decision which can be made in the freedom granted to them through the act of the almighty grace of God."

<sup>197</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 35. Webster's discussion highlights this ethical dimension of baptism with the Spirit, pointing out that, for Barth, Spirit-baptism brings about an autonomy that is not in competition with divine determination, but is freedom precisely in correspondence to this determination. See Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 143.

<sup>198</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 36.

attachments that would hinder their relationship with peoples from all histories and cultures.<sup>199</sup> This is what it means for Barth that baptism with the Spirit is identical with reception into “the Church as the assembly of those who.... continuing in a circle around Jesus, are engaged in doing the will of God as his people.” As baptism with the Spirit is to be distinguished from baptism with water, so this trans-cultural, trans-national, trans-temporal “assembly” is to be distinguished from the Church “as a Christian religious society.”<sup>200</sup> Baptism with the Spirit is identical with reception into the former, and calls for baptism with water as reception into the latter.

Barth continues his discussion by expanding on some of the consequences of baptism with the Spirit for the ordering of the life of the Church as a Christian religious society where each person who is baptized with the Spirit is equipped and called to their own task in the life and ministry of the community as a whole. He notes that, while this gift and task may be the same as their divine commission for a specific office within the institution of the Church, it may also be something transitory and changing that is not able to fit “within the confines of institutional office.” As a result, Barth argues that hierarchy within the Church must remain fluid, the gift of the Spirit not being identified with institutional office, but institutional office continuing to depend upon the gifting of the Holy Spirit. And while this gifting includes the specific *charismata* for the work of a particular office, the question of whether an individual is suited to institutional office in the Church depends “first and finally whether he is a recipient and bearer of the love which is above all spiritual gifts.” It is this gift of love that the community continually depends on and must pray for afresh “in the fulfillment of Christian fellow-humanity.”<sup>201</sup>

Barth’s fifth and final point is that baptism with the Holy Spirit is the beginning of a journey that continues to depend on the work of the Spirit, rather than being the setting in motion of something that then continues on its own. The life which follows this baptism “is not to be

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<sup>199</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 37. One baptized with the Spirit “unavoidably discovers himself to be the companion, fellow and brother of these others, bound to them for better or for worse, a participant in their strength and weakness, their joys and sorrows, their little victories and greater defeats, their whole life and enterprise and action.”

<sup>200</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 37.

<sup>201</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 38.

understood merely as the progress which corresponds to the beginning,<sup>202</sup> but continues to be a work of the Spirit. Baptism with the Spirit is a once-for-all event in the sense that “the work of God in and with the baptized is an event which takes place once for all times and therefore (to put it generally at first) on several occasions.”<sup>203</sup> Barth concludes with a discussion of two forms in which the event of baptism with the Spirit is repeated in the life of a Christian.

On one hand, the Christian life is “a constantly renewed bearing of fruit” as the Spirit with whom the Christian is baptized bears fruit in season. Without denying that a Christian life will progress and bear good fruit, Barth also notes that there will also be weeds and setbacks which bring the need for radical new beginnings.<sup>204</sup> In Barth’s view, a person never progresses beyond the need to depend on the Spirit for these new beginnings; the Christian is called to continually move forward in dependence on the Spirit, being willing, modest, and courageous enough to follow the direction of the Spirit as they encounter the “divine invitation and command” afresh.<sup>205</sup>

On the other hand, Barth suggests that the Christian life is the beginning of a journey; it is “one long Advent season” where the Christian is “impelled and directed by the Holy Spirit to wait for and hasten towards” a future which lies beyond the confines of the Christian life itself. The Christian life is a hastening as the Christian is impelled and directed by the Spirit to move toward the full and final manifestation of Jesus Christ, towards the full coming of the kingdom of God where God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. But this future is a goal that is beyond the Christian life. It will be reached not only as the Christian moves forward, but also as the future comes to meet the Christian. As a result, it is a future for which the Christian is impelled and

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<sup>202</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 38–39.

<sup>203</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 39.

<sup>204</sup>“It will always be necessary that the good work of the Holy Spirit which has begun thus or thus should begin again at the beginning, that the man to whom a beginning has been given should not be ashamed but happy that here or there, in this way or that, he may take this wholly new and supremely astonishing form, that he should be thus ‘continued’.” Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 39.

<sup>205</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 39.

directed by the Spirit to wait and pray. As part of the pilgrim people of God, the Christian is called to constantly chase “this perfection which awaits him and comes to meet him.”<sup>206</sup>

## 2.2 Baptism with water as responsive human action

The first step of this life of faithfulness to God, the Christian life, is a person’s baptism with water, which by her own decision is requested of the community and which is administered by the community, as the binding confession of her obedience, conversion and hope, made in prayer for God’s grace, wherein she honours the freedom of this grace.<sup>207</sup>

The second main section of the baptism fragment is Barth’s treatment of water baptism. Barth understands baptism with water and baptism with Spirit as “the wholly different action of two inalienably distinct subjects.”<sup>208</sup> They are two elements within the one event of the foundation of the Christian life, and as such they must be both correlated and distinguished. We saw in the preceding discussion that Barth understands human faithfulness as the goal of Spirit baptism. Having as its goal human faithfulness, this divine action both makes possible and demands human action. The second element in the foundation of the Christian life is water baptism as the human decision and act which is the goal of this divine change.

Barth insists that human response to God “cannot remain merely contemplative, speculative or meditative, nor can it be merely verbal” but must “become at once the Yes of an obedient grateful work in response to the command of grace.”<sup>209</sup> As such an obedient response, water baptism is a human act which shapes a person, establishing a person’s belief as a fact in their life, ratifying a person’s decision “before God, others and themselves,” with the result that they will forever be ones who have taken this “first and exemplary step on the way of obedience.”<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 40.

<sup>207</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 2.

<sup>208</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 41.

<sup>209</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 42.

<sup>210</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 43.

## 2.2.1 The basic New Testament data

Before proceeding further with his discussion Barth briefly describes seven points “which can be taken from the New Testament with relative exegetical certainty,” and upon which an understanding of Christian baptism can be built.<sup>211</sup>

In the first place, Barth notes that water baptism is “a bodily washing with water,” and that there is no evidence that any significance was attached to the form of this washing. Briefly mentioning secular Greek meanings, Barth observes that the New Testament uses of the language of baptism to denote dipping (Lk. 16.24, John 13.26, Rev. 19.13) and ritual washing (Lk 11.38, Mk 7.4, Heb 6.2; 9.2), but also includes transferred meanings such as when the death of Jesus is called a *βάπτισμα*.<sup>212</sup>

Furthermore, Barth argues that the importance of water is with respect to its formal character as bodily washing. He notes that the New Testament itself picks up on the imagery of water in baptism to “offer interesting sidelights on its significance in view of certain stories about water in the Old Testament,”<sup>213</sup> but argues that these are not part of a larger “theology of water as such in the New Testament.” Denying that there is even a hint “of any special power of even symbolical force attaching” to water and its effects, Barth concludes that “the water of baptism is important only because people usually wash or are washed with water.”<sup>214</sup>

Thirdly, Barth addresses the relationship between New Testament water baptism and both Jewish proselyte baptism and the washings involved in Hellenistic mystery religions. He suggests that proselyte baptism which later Judaism demanded of Gentile converts is a “clear if restricted historical parallel” to Christian water baptism. However, while both cases involve persons being “washed with water on the occasion of an important change in public station,” Barth notes that

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<sup>211</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 44.

<sup>212</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 45. Barth suggests that these texts pick up the meaning of “to overpower” while also making “significant reference back to the concrete happening in the Jordan.”

<sup>213</sup>1 Cor 10.1f and the Red Sea; 1 Pet 3.20f and Noah.

<sup>214</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 45.

there are significant difference between the two with respect to the relationship between the washing and circumcision and its role in purification. Also noting that John's baptism was addressed to Israelites, Barth concludes that "the distinction between New Testament baptism and pre-Christian Jewish baptism is thus as indisputable as their interrelation."<sup>215</sup> Barth also briefly addresses the question of parallels between water baptism and purifications in Hellenistic mystery religions, arguing that the parallels only apply if one has first decided that Christian baptism is "something that corresponds materially to the initiations and dedications practiced" in these religions, "namely, a sacramental mediation of salvation and revelation."<sup>216</sup>

Barth's fourth point is that water baptism appears to have been a practice "which was self-evident in the New Testament Church in all places and from the very outset." He suggests that in this way the primitive community acted "as if it had received an absolutely normative command which it could not evade keeping and which it thus accepted without dispute." Here Barth hints at what is to come by noting that the apostles were, like Jesus himself, baptized by John, and that Mat 28.19 is isolated from a literary point of view "and was perhaps not known to all everywhere and from the very beginning." I discuss the question of Mat 28.19 in detail in chapter 4 below.<sup>217</sup>

Barth also notes that, except for the accounts of Jesus baptism by John in the Jordan, baptism is never a major theme in the New Testament. He points out that other texts which mention baptism presuppose that it is practiced and known and refer to it in "illustration and enforcement of the ethical assertion of the Christian message. They do not teach it or present it, however, as an integral part of the message." Barth suggests that the fact that the New Testament normally mentions baptism in an ethical context "offers provisional justification" for his own treatment of it in the context of Christian ethics.

Barth further reinforces this point by observing that the number of texts which even mention baptism is relatively small, noting that "Galatians Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Peter and 1 John each contain only one unequivocal reference to baptism, while there is none at all in 2 Corinthians, 1

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<sup>215</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 46.

<sup>216</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 46.

<sup>217</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 46.

and 2 Thessalonians, James, Revelation, and rather surprisingly the Pastorals (Tit. 3.5 is too uncertain to count).<sup>218</sup> Rejecting the tendency he sees in others (O. Cullmann, for example) to fill out the Biblical witness to baptism by searching “for more or less clear indirect references,” Barth argues that the account of baptism contained in the accounts of John the Baptist and Jesus baptism by John are sufficient: “There is thus no occasion to seek allusions to it where the New Testament does not intend to speak of it explicitly.”<sup>219</sup>

Drawing the Scriptural narratives of baptism into his discussion, Barth notes that while the desire for baptism is rooted in God’s initiative, it also includes the desire of the candidate to be baptized: “In the New Testament, so far as may be seen, no one is baptized except in actual affirmation of the expressed Yes of his own faith to the Yes of God accepted by him. This applies at the Jordan, and later in Jerusalem, Samaria, Asia Minor and Greece.”<sup>220</sup>

Finally, Barth notes that in the New Testament “the action of the community... is indispensable to baptism... in the last resort it takes second place to the action of the candidate and simply assists this.” He argues that the community’s role is to acknowledge and accept the one baptized “as a member of itself and of Jesus Christ,” thereby bringing a person “publicly into its confession” and including a person “in its prayer of thanksgiving, praise, and petition.” Barth argues that the New Testament does not present the community, or any subset of the community, as having any “more mysterious splendor” and does not present the power or competence to baptize as being held by any group within the community.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup>Barth’s judgment concerning Titus 3.5 is addressed in chapter 5 below.

<sup>219</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 47–48.

<sup>220</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 49.

<sup>221</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 49–50.

## 2.2.2 The basis for Christian baptism

Having briefly set out what these relatively certain exegetical assumptions concerning what the New Testament has to say about baptism, Barth proceeds to a discussion of Christian water baptism. He first takes up the question of the basis of Christian baptism, of why it is that Christians practice baptism. His answer to this question expands upon two of the pieces of basic New Testament data which he identified. On the one hand, baptism was the universal practice of the New Testament community in all places and from the very outset: it was *semper, ubique et ab omnibus*. But on the other hand, the New Testament baptism primarily mentions baptism in the course of other arguments, primarily ethical ones. If the primitive community acted as if it had received an “absolutely normative command which it could not evade keeping and which it thus accepted without dispute,”<sup>222</sup> Barth asks when and how it received such a command.

Barth’s answer is that the command to be a baptized and baptising community “was issued directly in and with the manifestation of the history of Jesus Christ.”<sup>223</sup> Particularly when seen together the temptation narratives, Barth argues that the baptism of Jesus characterizes and sets in motion the whole history of Jesus Christ which reaches its goal on Golgotha.<sup>224</sup> As the beginning of the history of Jesus Christ, the narrative of the baptism of Jesus is itself an absolutely normative command that his followers also should be baptized.

Barth argues that the baptismal command having been given in the account of the baptism of Jesus by John is a sufficient explanation for the absence of a clear baptismal command elsewhere in the New Testament: If baptism is taught and described in accounts of John the Baptist and especially of Jesus, “then there is no need for this to be done again explicitly in later writings. It is enough, as in the epistles, to refer to it in certain connexions, which significantly, are ethical.”<sup>225</sup> In making this argument, Barth rejects the most common alternative answer to the

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<sup>222</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 47.

<sup>223</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 47.

<sup>224</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 53.

<sup>225</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 48.



question of the basis of baptism, that being that the risen Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize. He notes that this explanation for the basis of baptism is based on Matthew 28.19 alone, and offers a threefold argument that this text should not be understood as the basis for Christian baptism.

In the first place Barth argues that, as words of the risen Jesus, the resurrected Jesus' command to baptize is not a new command, but points back to the history of Jesus Christ.<sup>226</sup> This reflects Barth's understanding, articulated in earlier volumes of his *Doctrine of Reconciliation*, that the work and words of the risen Jesus do not add to the history of Jesus Christ, but are instead a manifestation of the meaning of the history of Jesus Christ, "the work of salvation publicly declared as the word of salvation, the revelation of the history of the life and death of Jesus Christ in its meaning for the world."<sup>227</sup> Therefore Matthew 28.19 is a repetition and expansion of the baptismal command enacted in the baptism of Jesus by John:

In relation to our question as to the basis of Christian baptism, this explicit command to baptize refers us to the history of Jesus Christ as such, whose manifestation is at issue in the resurrection. As Easter stories in general are not to be regarded as accounts of new words, acts and sufferings on the part of Jesus Christ, but as the record of the powerful working of those already accomplished, so the direct command to baptize is not a new thing, but an explication and proclamation of the institution of baptism already effected previously in the history of Jesus Christ, namely, in his baptism in the Jordan...wherewith he had himself baptized by John.<sup>228</sup>

Furthermore, picking up on his observation concerning the ubiquity of baptism in the early Church, Barth observes that there are no references to the event narrated in Matthew 28.19

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<sup>226</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 51.

<sup>227</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 51.

<sup>228</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 52.

elsewhere in the New Testament. He argues that the “astonishing *semper ubique ab omnibus* hardly applies to [Matthew 28.19] for it is unlikely that Matthew’s Gospel or the prototype here followed, was from the very first known and read throughout the Christian world of the time.”<sup>229</sup> In marked contrast to the literary isolation of Matthew 28.19, Barth points out that the baptism of Jesus is found in each of the four Gospels, and he argues that it is this universally known act of Jesus that was the institution of baptism for Jesus’ disciples and which explains the *semper ubique ad omnibus* of Christian baptism.<sup>230</sup>

And Barth also argues that the intention of Matthew 28.19 is missional rather than baptismal. He suggests that the emphasis in this text is not on baptising as such, but on who should be baptized and how they should be baptized. Barth understands Jesus to be instructing his disciples to extend the baptism which John practiced, and which Jesus received, to Gentiles. Jesus thereby extends and enriches their understanding of this baptism, as a baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and as connected with Jesus’ teachings, directing the disciples “to lead Gentiles to an observance of that which he, Jesus, enjoined upon his followers.”<sup>231</sup>

### 2.2.2.1 The ministry and proclamation of John the Baptist

Because the baptism of Jesus by John is the basis for baptism, Barth’s understanding of the ministry of John the Baptist, and the relationship between this ministry and that of Jesus, is foundational for his understanding of Christian baptism. In contrast with those who view John as an apocalyptic voice of judgment who stands in contrast with the good news of Jesus, Barth understands John’s proclamation and baptismal ministry as in continuity with that of Jesus and the subsequent Christian community.

Barth suggests that the core of the Baptist’s proclamation was the announcement of an imminent act of God that would “change the situation of Israel and the Israelite.”<sup>232</sup> Barth identifies three

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<sup>229</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 51.

<sup>230</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 51–52.

<sup>231</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 52.

<sup>232</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 55.

aspects to this imminent event: i) the breaking in of the kingdom of heaven, “the establishment on earth of the divine dominion already set up in heaven”; ii) the breaking in of “God’s penetrating and divisive judgment”; iii) the breaking in of remission of sins, whereby the sins of Israel are brought under the grace of God in an act of “God’s rectifying and hence redeeming righteousness.”<sup>233</sup> The event that John announced was the inbreaking of that which subordinates all other sovereignties and dominions, all other judgments, and a remission of sins which leaves room only for “the astonished joy of faith.”<sup>234</sup>

Echoing his discussion of the impossibility of human faithfulness with which the baptism fragment begins, Barth suggests that the readiness required to submit to God’s dominion, to recognize God’s judgment, to be joyful in faith, goes beyond any human capability, but requires a new person, “a person who is radically changed in mind and thought and aspiration and will, a man who is adequate for this new thing and open to it.” He argues that the repentance John called for was a conversion, a radical turning of the whole person. and identifies three aspects of this repentance, corresponding to the three aspects of John’s proclamation.<sup>235</sup>

In the first place, the repentance required as readiness for the imminent act of God was first of all a change of life in view of the imminent inbreaking kingdom of God. The repentance which John called for was ethical in focus; it was an “adjustment to the will of God operative and manifest in the coming event,” the coming kingdom of heaven. Referring to the directions which John gives in Luke 3.10, Barth emphasizes that it is a turning to God and toward others which involves a practical change of life, “a total practical alteration of attitude and direction.”<sup>236</sup>

Secondly, the required repentance involved confession of sin, an acknowledging of the justice of God’s judgment and a looking forward to the coming remission of sins. In view of the coming demonstration of God’s grace, the imminent forgiveness of sins which John announced, the

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<sup>233</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 56.

<sup>234</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 56–57.

<sup>235</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 57.

<sup>236</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 57.

repentance which John called for was a confession of sins.<sup>237</sup> Barth understands John call for a confession of sin as a hopeful message, directed toward the coming demonstration of God's grace in forgiveness. While acknowledging that there is an unmistakable note of judgment in John's preaching, Barth argues that the content of John's proclamation is salvation, his preaching being "expressly described in Lk. 3.18 as a *εὐαγγελίζεσθαι*."<sup>238</sup> With respect to John's announcement of the coming judgment of God, Barth argues that John's emphasis is not so much on fleeing the wrath of God as it is on accepting that the wrath of God is justifiable. This is what confession of sins involves, and such an attitude is directed not toward self-preservation in the face of the wrath of God as much as it is directed towards a change of life which will produce good fruits.

Touching on the key question of the relationship between baptism and the forgiveness of sins, Barth explains that confessing sin in baptism a person looks forward to forgiveness. Forgiveness was not imminent in the act of baptism itself. Rather, John's was a baptism that was teleologically oriented towards forgiveness, being a baptism of repentance *εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν* (Mk 1.4): "They look forward to [forgiveness] as a free, uncontrived act of God which cannot be called forth in any way. In their baptism, however, they do make confession of their sins as the act which is commensurate with and appropriate to the taking away of their sins by God."<sup>239</sup>

And thirdly, Barth suggests that John's baptism of repentance was a concrete and binding form of confession of the Messiah who comes after John. Probably the most radical of Barth's claims concerning John's baptism was that it was a Messianic baptism, and in particular that, because the Stronger One with reference to whom John's baptism took place is Jesus Christ, John's baptism is properly understood as a concrete and binding form of conversion to Jesus. Barth's logic for making this striking claim is that the concrete form of the imminent act of God which John announced was the coming of the Stronger One, a human person who would come after him. Barth argues that it is with reference to the qualitatively distinct baptism that this person

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<sup>237</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 57.

<sup>238</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 56.

<sup>239</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 57–58.

would bring that John wished that his own preaching and baptism would be understood: “[John] announced this man, this Other, when he announced the coming kingdom, the coming judgment, the coming remission of sins. The imminent new act of God would consist in the history of this man.”<sup>240</sup>

In support of view, Barth appeals to the Biblical portrayal of John as the prophet going before the coming One (Lk 1.76), the forerunner, the precursor described in Isaiah 40.3 and Mal 3.1. John’s baptism took place with reference to this Stronger One who would bring a baptism which was totally, qualitatively, distinct from John’s baptism: a baptism with Spirit (and fire). Barth argues that the account of the Synoptics clearly “show that this explicitly Messianic proclamation is regarded as the true burden of [John’s] preaching and baptism, of his whole history.”<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, he suggests that the Fourth Gospel only reinforces this, with its distinctive concentration on John’s role as witness to Jesus as Messiah.<sup>242</sup> Thus, Barth argues that the conversion that John called for was not simply a moral or religious conversion, but rather a conversion to the Messiah. The coming kingdom, judgment and remission which John proclaimed are all to be understood with reference to this Messiah so that John’s baptism consisted

in conversion to the Messiah Jesus, in faith in the kingdom which had drawn nigh in him, in the judgment which was to be executed by him, in the remission of sins which he should pronounce... the water baptism which John required and gave, and which was received from him, could be only the concrete and binding form of this conversion, of faith in Jesus.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 61.

<sup>241</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 61.

<sup>242</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 61–62.

<sup>243</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 62. This controversial claim is, of course, made in hindsight. It is only in retrospect that those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah that they can say that “those baptized by John in the Jordan were as such truly called, invited and summoned to faith in Jesus Christ. Accepting John’s baptism, they made in fact a genuine confession of Jesus Christ.” Barth may

### 2.2.2.2 The baptism of Jesus by John

Having argued that John's baptism was in anticipation of the coming Messiah who would baptize with Holy Spirit and fire, Barth observes that one might wonder why it is that Christians baptized with water: Why was John's baptism with water not superseded by Spirit-baptism? Why is that which John practiced normative for what Christians do? For Barth, the answer is that Christians baptize because John's preaching and baptism were not mere precursors to the ministry of Jesus, but were themselves taken up by Jesus who heard John and was baptized.

For Barth, by his baptism Jesus accomplished the renewal and conversion demanded by John, responding with human faithfulness to John's proclamation.<sup>244</sup> Organizing his discussion under three main points, Barth notes that in his baptism: i) Jesus confessed and submitted to the Lordship of God, "freely, concretely, unequivocally, and unconditionally" placing himself under it; ii) Jesus freely, concretely and unequivocally confessed and placed himself in fellowship and solidarity with humanity whose only hope before God was the remission of sins; iii) Jesus set out to serve both God and humanity by doing "that which as God's work he alone could do for humanity," and that "which as human work only he could do for God."<sup>245</sup>

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try to press this too far. This is clearly the case when he attempts to interpret Acts 19.4f as supporting this view (Karl Barth, *CD* IV/4, 62, 75). Commenting on Acts 19.4 C.K. Barrett notes that "A curious interpretation of the verse is given by Barth (*CD* 4.4, 62, 75), who takes the subject of *ἀκούσαντες ἐβαπτίσθησαν* to be the crowds who listened to John and were baptized by him. His baptism was, by anticipation, baptism into the name of Christ. This being so there was no need for further baptism of the 'disciples,' and, their baptism being now removed from the verse, they no more than Apollos receive a second baptism. Apart from its general improbability this is an impossible way of understanding the sentence. Those who heard and were baptized were the *αὐτοῦς* on whom the Spirit came (v.6), the group of men who numbered about twelve (v.7). It is unfortunate that Barth's important discussion of baptism should be marred by this piece of exegesis." C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, International Critical Commentaries (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994), 897.

<sup>244</sup> Karl Barth, *CD* IV/4, 58. "As one simple member of his people among others," Jesus is baptized and thereby "accomplished the great renewal and conversion which is demanded by the proclamation of that which is about to come.

<sup>245</sup> Karl Barth, *CD* IV/4, 54.

Barth's first point is that the baptism of Jesus was an act of unconditional and irrevocable submission to the will of God through which Jesus entered his office as Messiah, Saviour and Mediator in obedience to the command of God.<sup>246</sup> Jesus' baptism was obedience to the word of God: "Himself an Israelite, he heard with all Israel (Lk. 3.2) the Word of God which had come to this John. With many others, he obeyed it by having himself baptized."<sup>247</sup> With and like others, Jesus has himself baptized to prepare himself, to be ready for the coming kingdom, the coming judgment, and the coming forgiveness of sins which were the content of the Word of God which John proclaimed.<sup>248</sup> What others did in coming to be baptized by John, Jesus also did.<sup>249</sup>

An important aspect of Barth's argument is that Jesus faithful response to John's proclamation included confession of *his* sin. For Barth, the question of the Baptist recorded in Matt 3.14 reflects a fundamental misunderstanding that the writer of the Gospel of Matthew seeks to clear up. He explains that if Jesus had refused to submit to God's judgment, to vindicate God even against himself, this would have been sin.<sup>250</sup> Jesus' confession of sin is further explained by Barth's discussion of the second point.

Furthermore, Barth suggests that the baptism of Jesus was an act of unconditional and irrevocable solidarity with sinful humanity. He explains that Jesus' confession of God involves a confession of other human persons because to be committed to the will of God is to be committed to those "who are in view in this doing of God's will."<sup>251</sup> Barth describes the extent of

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<sup>246</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 54.

<sup>247</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 55.

<sup>248</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 56.

<sup>249</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 58. "He submitted to the Father's dominion. He accepted the necessity of his judgment and its execution. He believed in the goodness of the God who remits sins."

<sup>250</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 58. Here Barth offers the provisional paradoxical statement that "the sinlessness of Jesus demonstrated itself in the fact that he did not refuse this confession, this baptism of John, but submitted to them, and therewith gave the glory unreservedly to God. He, the Son, was fully obedient to the Father in this."

<sup>251</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 58. Because Jesus "is committed unreservedly to subordination to God, therefore he is committed unreservedly to solidarity with men."

Jesus' solidarity with humanity as complete negation of the difference between himself and others, insisting that this extends to a solidarity in sin.<sup>252</sup> With his people Jesus received John's message, looked forward to God's kingdom, judgment and remission; "with them he obeyed the call for conversion.... with them he had himself baptized with water. With them he thus confessed his sins."<sup>253</sup> For Barth, the affirmation that Jesus confessed his sins is a consequence of the totality of Jesus' self-giving wherein Jesus identified with sinful humanity:

When faced by the sins of all others, their confusions and corruptions, their big and little acts of ungodliness, [he] did not let these sins be theirs, did not regard, bewail, or judge them from a distance with tacit or open accusation, did not simply characterize them as sins by his own otherness, but as the Son of his Father, elected and ordained from all eternity to be the Brother of these fatal brethren, cause them to be his own sins, confessed them as such, and therewith confessed that he was baptized in prospect of God's kingdom, judgment and forgiveness. No-one who came to the Jordan was as laden and afflicted as he. No one was as needy. No one was so utterly human, because so wholly fellow-human.<sup>254</sup>

In Barth's understanding, Jesus stands under the fearful judgment which John proclaimed because Jesus "does not stand at a distance from the sin of others and its curse. He bears it as his own in order to bear it away, to take its curse out of the world."<sup>255</sup> For Barth, Jesus' baptism is the beginning of the history that is the reconciliation of the world.

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<sup>252</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 59. In contrast to a king who might dress up as a beggar to mingle for a time with the crowd, Jesus belonged to the crowd "in every way, by being no more and no less than one of them, by having no point of reference except to them."

<sup>253</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 59.

<sup>254</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 59.

<sup>255</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 60.



And finally, Barth suggests that, by his baptism, Jesus entered into service to both God and humanity, and thereby began fulfilling the covenant which is his ministry of reconciliation. As the one who would come after John, in his baptism Jesus proclaimed himself as mediator whose subjection to God was total commitment to humanity, and whose commitment to humanity was an act of subjection to God.

Barth argues that Jesus was baptized into himself in the sense of taking up his mission, “accepting that he was claimed and committed to this work.”<sup>256</sup> In contrast to the failure to understand that subjection to God included solidarity with humanity in sin evident in Mat 3.14, in his baptism Jesus took up his messianic “ministry and way of life in a manner typical and decisive for all that was to follow.”<sup>257</sup>

Barth understands the events immediately following the baptism of Jesus as confirmations of this messianic identity. The opening of the heavens, the descent of the Spirit, and the heavenly voice function like exclamation points, confirming and displaying the divinity of the mission of Jesus. Careful to maintain the distinction between the human obedience of Jesus and the divine confirmation, Barth points out that these heavenly actions, while related to the earthly actions of baptism, are not identical to them. Rather than being a “getting, grasping or receiving of the grace and revelation of God needed for the discharge of his ministry,” Jesus’ baptism was only “his practical, concrete yes to the ministry corresponding to his election and calling... and to his own utter need in relation to God.”<sup>258</sup> And as the baptism is the beginning of Jesus’ entry into his ministry, the path that lead to Golgotha, the theophany subsequent to his baptism anticipates his vindication in resurrection:

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<sup>256</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 63.

<sup>257</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 64. According to Barth, Jesus’ baptism was “his act of obedience, as the concrete form of his subjection to God, as the concrete achievement of solidarity with the men of his people... as his concrete confession of himself and his election and calling.”

<sup>258</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 65. Barth draws a connection between Jesus’ decision at his baptism and Gesthemane, baptism being the beginning of the decision that he decisively confirms in the Garden. On Barth and Gesthemane, see Paul Dafydd Jones, “Karl Barth on Gesthemane,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 2 (April 2007): 148–71 and Paul Dafydd Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011).

What was manifested in this anticipation of his resurrection was that Jesus needed the almighty mercy of God like any other man, but that, without controlling it, speculating on it, or meriting it, he was sure of it, so that he could be free to take up his task without murmuring or complaint, to enter on his ministry with complete unselfishness, to fulfill it again and again in the future, and thus to confess God, men and himself.<sup>259</sup>

### 2.2.2.3 The baptism of Jesus as the basis for Christian baptism

In Barth's view, Christians are baptized with water because John's preaching and baptism were taken up by Jesus who heard John and was baptized. In this way the command to be a baptized and baptising community "was issued directly in and with the manifestation of the history of Jesus Christ."<sup>260</sup> As an integral element of the good news of Jesus Christ, the baptism of Jesus by John was not of merely historical interest to the primitive community as they entered on the way to which they were called. Instead, water baptism

necessarily became exemplary, normative and binding in respect of the form of the beginning of their life.... [The community] had to follow his act of obedience, his subjection to God, his solidarity with men, his acceptance of service both of God and men. It had to submit to this, to integrate itself into it.<sup>261</sup>

As an act which characterized and set in motion Jesus' life and ministry, so too the community is called to baptism as an act which is to characterize and set in motion their life and ministry. The community was not called upon "to enter a new Messianic and saving office of its own. But it

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<sup>259</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 67–68.

<sup>260</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 47.

<sup>261</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 68.

did have to enter on the way of those who are called to be his witnesses, and who are thus called to fellowship with him (1 Cor . 1.9).”<sup>262</sup>

Barth concludes his discussion of the basis of Christian baptism by noting again that while the New Testament never explicitly articulates a connection between the baptism of Jesus and Christian water baptism, it clearly portrays the baptism of Jesus as “an integral element of the proclamation of the community” in contrast to the literary isolation of Matthew 28.19. As a result, an understanding of the baptism of Jesus as itself an injunction that Christians be baptized provides a more adequate explanation for the *semper ubique et ab omnibus* of Christian baptism.<sup>263</sup>

### 2.2.3 The goal of baptism

Having grounded his understanding of baptism in the baptism of Jesus by John, Barth takes up the question of the goal of baptism: what is the goal of the community who baptizes and what is the goal of the candidate who asks for and receives baptism from the community?

For Barth, the goal of baptism is found through a consideration of its basis. He notes that the goal of John’s baptism was not immanent to the act itself, but that baptism was carried out in expectation of the transcendent divine action of the coming kingdom, judgment, remission, and Stronger One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Barth argues that, similarly, Christian baptism intends, affirms, and seeks out something which is beyond the act of baptism itself.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 68.

<sup>263</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 68.

<sup>264</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 71. Here Barth notes that the New Testament typically refers to baptism as a baptism *εις*, suggesting that this indicates the teleological character of baptism. Barth concludes his discussion of the goal of baptism with an extended excursus addressing some exegetical issues arising from his discussion. Noting that translating *εις* as “in” with respect to baptism tends to suppress the teleological movement of baptism and awakens associations with sacral authorization of the minister, Barth includes a discussion of the New Testament baptismal formulae. Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 90–100. Barth suggests that the important thing is that each of these formulae characterize baptism “unequivocally as a movement into Jesus Christ,” including the Trinitarian formula of Matthew 28.19. In view of this he argues that there is no exegetical, dogmatic or theological necessity for the Trinitarian formula to be used for a valid baptism, though noting that “there is also no theological need to disturb ecumenical

Barth explains that this goal is none other than God's act of reconciliation in the history of Jesus Christ, which is the divine accomplishing of the change from human unfaithfulness to faithfulness discussed above.

The relationship of Christian baptism to this divine act is not that of cause to effect, as if the administration of baptism effects or contributes to God's work of reconciliation. As discussed above, for Barth the change from unfaithfulness to faithfulness took place in the history of Jesus Christ and needs no supplement. Rather, God's work of reconciliation liberates and summons human beings to responsive human action which corresponds to God's action, "to acknowledge the work of God, to bear witness to it, to confess it, to respond to it, to honour, praise and magnify it."<sup>265</sup> As Jesus' baptism was not a demonstration of his divine identity and power but was his obedient hearing and responding to John's proclamation and promise of the coming kingdom, judgment, remission of God, so Christian baptism is not an accomplishing or effecting of salvation but "takes place with a view to God's word and work as a pure and sincerely humble act of obedience which looks forward and moves toward the divine act of salvation and revelation, doing so in modest resolution and with resolute modesty."<sup>266</sup>

Highlighting the ecclesial context of baptism, Barth notes that in baptism both candidate and community actively confess their faith in the event of God's work of reconciliation, and thereby find themselves associated with one another. This common confession looks forward to the demonstration of the divine act of grace and revelation, bearing witness to God's work in expectation and confidence "that God's work will infallibly demonstrate its power in their lives."<sup>267</sup>

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custom, whether by dispensing with a formula or substituting another formula for the Trinitarian formula which is used *semper ubique et ab omnibus*." Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 92.

<sup>265</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 72.

<sup>266</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 73.

<sup>267</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 74.

### 2.2.3.1 John's baptism and Christian baptism

While grounding his understanding of baptism in the baptism of John the Baptist, Barth acknowledges that there are some important differences between the goal of John's baptism and that of the baptism practiced by the community of Jesus Christ after Pentecost.<sup>268</sup> He briefly discusses six important differences between Christian baptism and the baptism of John that arise from the fact that the event to which John pointed is no longer a purely future event.

The first difference that Barth identifies is that in Christian baptism the kingdom of God has become "an element... in temporal world occurrence," such that baptism is not only a form of petition but also the commencement of life in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. After Pentecost, the kingdom is now present "in a total perfection which can never be surpassed," though the manifestation of this presence, which began on Easter Day, "calls and presses for continuation and completion." Standing in a different relation to the kingdom and rule of God, Barth suggests that Christian baptism has "a seriousness and power which it could not have had in its original form as John's baptism."<sup>269</sup>

Furthermore, Barth notes that in Christian baptism the impartation of the Holy Spirit to which John anticipated is now also a reality, having taken place at Pentecost and repeatedly since.<sup>270</sup> By contrast, Barth observes that when the New Testament speaks of those who were only in the sphere of John, it speaks of those who not empowered by the Spirit.<sup>271</sup> While it does not bring

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<sup>268</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 75. Barth understands Pentecost to be the event in which the community of Jesus Christ was visibly constituted, an event in which Jesus definitively revealed to his followers that he was the one to whom John pointed, "appointing, empowering and equipping [his followers] as his witnesses to the world."

<sup>269</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 76.

<sup>270</sup>Barth associates the impartation of the Spirit with the calling, equipping and instructing for the ministry of witness to Jesus Christ as at Pentecost (Acts 2.3f), as well as with the reception of the love of God (Rom 5.5) and adoption as children of God (Rom 8.16).

<sup>271</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 76–77. Noting that those mentioned in Acts 19.2 had not even heard of the Holy Spirit, Barth mentions the question of whether or not these disciples were representative of John's circle. He also notes that, "according to the notable editorial saying in Jn 7.39... the whole history of Jesus himself prior to its manifestation, and hence prior to Easter, took place in the sphere of John and was itself Advent history in this respect."

about the impartation of the Spirit, Barth suggests that, looking back on Jesus' sending of the Spirit, Christian baptism includes an expectation of the imparting of the Spirit that is "more tense and lively." He concludes by noting that the relationship between Christian baptism and baptism with the Spirit is the same as its relationship to the coming of the kingdom of God: Christian baptism is not itself the baptism of the Spirit, but is a form of the petition for such baptism, a petition made in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the one who can and will do this.<sup>272</sup>

Similarly, Barth argues that after Pentecost the anticipation of the judgment of God is also intensified, explaining that it has been made manifest that in the history of Jesus Christ the judgment of God has been executed on human sin. Christian baptism is subjection to this judgment, an acknowledgment that a person has no more future as one who sins, and that all freedom to sin or compulsion to sin has been done away with. Drawing heavily on Romans 6.1-11, Barth notes that the one baptized regards them self as one who is dead for sin, one who has acknowledged that "to wish to sin and commit to sin is a possibility closed to them." For Barth, the fact that those baptized do, in fact, continue to commit sin and thereby "choose and actualise that excluded possibility" only makes more clear that "baptism in the name of Jesus is orientation to God's judgment with a severity which was, of course, intimated, but could only be intimated, in the baptism of John."<sup>273</sup> Noting that this heightened emphasis on God's judgment explains the exegetical addition of "and fire" in Matthew's and Luke's accounts of John's proclamation of the baptism which the coming one would bring, Barth concludes that "after Pentecost there can be no baptism with water unless one is now more urgently and seriously conscious of the jealous No of God than in the baptism of John."<sup>274</sup>

Barth also notes that in Christian baptism the remission of sins which John spoke of has also taken place. In view of the Resurrection the Christian knows that God's No was "enclosed in his Yes" so that Christian baptism "looks first to God's love and election, and only in the light of

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<sup>272</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 77–78.

<sup>273</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 79.

<sup>274</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 80.

this (as its reverse side) to his hate and rejection.<sup>275</sup> Observing that John's proclamation entertained the possibility of forgiveness and obedience, Barth notes that the overall impression of John's preaching is more of threat than of good news. After Pentecost, however, Barth suggests that repentance becomes an active acknowledgment and affirmation of the good news of God's forgiveness, not as "the condition which man must fulfill to attain forgiveness" but as "faith in the good news of the kingdom which has come." Thus, Barth observes, "we read of the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized by Philip (Ac 8.39) something which we do not read of those baptized by John in the Jordan: 'He went on his way rejoicing'."<sup>276</sup>

The fifth difference which Barth identifies is that after Pentecost baptism took on a gathering and uniting role that it did not have in John's ministry. Barth notes that, while a group gathered around John and persisted for some time after his death, there is no evidence that John's baptism was oriented towards the creation of a community or fellowship. He explains the gathering and uniting role that baptism took on after Pentecost by the fact that baptism took on a particular relationship with Jesus Christ. For Barth, it was not that baptism became "an initiation into the mysteries and redemptive techniques of a new religious society," but that, as a baptism in the name of Jesus, "the public declaration of the baptized that they stand in a personal relation" to Jesus necessarily involves being recognized as "members of the body which is called in and with him." Those baptized into Christ come to recognize themselves, and are recognized by the community, as members of the witnessing the community, "as members of the clearly manifested people of God of the fulfilled time, as brothers and sisters 'in the Lord'."<sup>277</sup>

Finally, Barth notes that while John's baptism was directed primarily towards Israel, as baptism "in the name of him who is the Messiah of Israel and the *Soter* of the world," Christian baptism is baptism "in one body which is the Church of both Jews and Gentiles." While a slight opening to Gentiles already existed in the history of Israel, and was perhaps intimated by John's announcement that God could raise up children to Abraham from stones, Barth notes that unity

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<sup>275</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 81.

<sup>276</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 82.

<sup>277</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 83.

of Jewish root and ingrafted Gentiles described in Rom 11.16f describes “the greatly extended horizon within which baptism is now administered and received.”<sup>278</sup>

### 2.2.3.2 Summary: The goal of baptism.

Barth concludes his discussion of the goal of Christian baptism by reflecting on three things learned from the comparison of John’s baptism with baptism of the primitive Christian community.

First of all, John’s baptism and Christian baptism stand in different relation to a common goal. Both baptisms take place with reference to the one divine act of salvation and revelation that is the history of Jesus Christ, John’s baptism taking place in anticipation of what was to come, Christian baptism takes place having seen the divine act of salvation and revelation “accomplished, actualized and fulfilled as God’s act” in the history of Jesus Christ.<sup>279</sup> For Barth, both John’s baptism and Christian baptism are concrete forms of conversion to Christ and to faith in Christ, the former implicitly and the latter explicitly. Both baptisms are directed towards Jesus Christ, and thereby toward “the kingdom, the Spirit, judgment, forgiveness, membership of the people of God, and the existence in fellowship of Jews with Gentiles and Gentiles with Jews in him.”<sup>280</sup>

Furthermore, John’s baptism and Christian baptism depict their common goal in different ways. The fact that what was anticipated but unknown for John’s baptism has become known gives Christian baptism “a distinctive and unmistakable clarity, brightness, precision and depth.” Barth argues that the kingdom, Spirit, judgment, forgiveness and community which were the goal of John’s baptism have been given definite shape in Christ so that “there is no way back... from Christian baptism after Pentecost to the relative provincialism, imprecision and obscurity of

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<sup>278</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 84. Barth notes that the accounts of the growth of the community in Acts reveal that it was not merely Paul, but the “whole of the Christian community” that took the “great step into open country” that was the full inclusion of Gentiles in the community. Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 85.

<sup>279</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 85–86.

<sup>280</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 86.



John's baptism." As a result, Christian baptism has a "brighter, more joyful and more positive character" than did John's baptism.<sup>281</sup>

Thirdly, Barth notes an area where there is not a difference between John's baptism and Christian baptism, insisting that Christian baptism does not bring about the goal of baptism any more than John's baptism did. Barth insists that Jesus Christ being the origin, theme and content of baptism and faith "does not mean that he becomes either in whole or in part the subject of faith and baptism," or that his work "is to be ascribed to faith or baptism as the instruments, channels, or means which he uses." Referring back to the six areas of comparison between John's baptism and Christian baptism, he asks: "in our comparison where did we find even a hint that in, with and under the water baptism administered and received by men there takes place a continuation, repetition or doublet of the divine act of salvation and revelation, or that there is present an anticipatory immanence of the goal of this human action?"<sup>282</sup> Barth insists that Jesus Christ's movement towards humanity remains his movement, and that both John's baptism and Christian baptism are human movements toward the divine act of salvation and revelation that is the history of Jesus Christ.<sup>283</sup>

Barth's discussion of the goal of Christian baptism can be summarized simply by saying that baptism is a movement towards Jesus Christ, towards the divine act of salvation and revelation that is the history of Jesus Christ. Baptism takes place looking back on this history, in awareness of the continuing presence of the subject of this history, and looking forward, "in prospect of the fact that at the last he will be definitively, perfectly and universally be manifested" as the one who accomplished this work. As a movement towards Jesus Christ, baptism is "the first concrete step of the human decision and obedience" which corresponds to the divine act of salvation and revelation, and is "thus the true baptism of conversion."<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>281</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 87.

<sup>282</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 88.

<sup>283</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 89.

<sup>284</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 90.

## 2.2.4 The meaning of baptism

Having discussed baptism as a free act of obedience to the command to be baptized that was issued in the history of Jesus Christ, and having discussed baptism as an act whereby a person looks and moves toward Jesus Christ, the third main section of Barth's discussion of water baptism explores the question of the meaning of baptism as a human action.<sup>285</sup>

Barth acknowledges that in finding the meaning of baptism in its character as a human act he is rejecting a long standing and pervasive sacramental view of baptism. He insists, however, that the dignity and significance of baptism as a "truly human word and work" is overshadowed and obscured if baptism is treated docetically, the meaning being located "in a supposedly immanent divine work."<sup>286</sup> Briefly discussing Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed views of baptism, Barth notes that, in spite of the differences, in these three traditions "the meaning of baptism is to be sought and found in a divine action which is concealed in the administration by men and which makes use of this."<sup>287</sup> Acknowledging that he is opposing "in principle and *ab ovo* an ancient and overwhelmingly strong ecclesiastical and theological tradition," Barth argues that baptism needs to be demythologized. Baptism, Barth insists, is not itself a mystery or sacrament but is the proper human response to the mystery of the history of Jesus Christ, of his resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit: "It is the human action whose meaning is obedience to Jesus Christ and hope in him."<sup>288</sup>

Barth insists that it is by understanding water baptism as human obedience and hope that it is given its proper dignity and value. In this regard, he differentiates his rejection of a sacramental interpretation of baptism from "gnostic" critiques, whether of the patristic, reformation, or contemporary eras, which reject sacramental understandings of baptism in order to replace the

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<sup>285</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 101.

<sup>286</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 101.

<sup>287</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 103–05.

<sup>288</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 105. Barth notes that he is not contesting that God is "*auctor primarius* of all creaturely occurrence," but that as such God does not suppress human action, but instead awakens, establishes and demands human obedience as "a counter-witness which receives and affirms the witness of the Holy Spirit." Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 106.

external sacrament with “an ‘inner work’ in the form of experiences, inspirations, illuminations, exaltations or raptures.” As Barth sees it, such interpretations also leave “no place for the man who obeys the work and word of God.”<sup>289</sup> Far from such a denigration of concrete human activity, Barth insists that baptism’s true dignity is as a human action whereby a person “may take up his responsibility to God’s work and word in a first public and binding act, and may thus begin to live the life of one who is obedient to the divine promise and claim.”<sup>290</sup>

#### 2.2.4.1 The Biblical basis for a sacramental understanding of baptism

Before further developing his ethical understanding of baptism as a concrete act of obedience and hope, Barth pauses to give an answer to the representatives of the sacramental tradition. Acknowledging that this tradition appeals to passages in the New Testament in support of their understanding of baptism, Barth seeks to do justice to this tradition by setting aside the results of his discussion of the New Testament thus far in order to consider whether there are other “New Testament statements about the meaning of baptism, about what takes place when it is administered, in which... there is ascribed to it a sacramental character, a hidden work and word of God which completely relativizes the action of the human participants” that might force us to “reassess our conclusions about the basis and goal of baptism.”<sup>291</sup>

The details of Barth’s consideration of the biblical basis for a sacramental understanding of baptism will be addressed below, in chapter 5. Here it is enough to describe his conclusions. While Barth acknowledges that it is possible to understand some of the passages sacramentally, he finds that there are no passages which requires such an interpretation. Furthermore, he notes that there are a number of passages that rule out a sacramental understanding of baptism completely.<sup>292</sup> Barth acknowledges the caution that must accompany such exegetical findings, but insists that the awareness that his exegetical judgments may be shown to be mistaken does

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<sup>289</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 106.

<sup>290</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 107.

<sup>291</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 107–08.

<sup>292</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 127–28.

not prevent him from proceeding in his discussion of baptism: “We have no option but to maintain that until we are further instructed both as a whole and in detail we must regard these findings as proved and binding, and presuppose them in all that follows.”<sup>293</sup>

### 2.2.4.2 Three formal statements

Assuming the results of his examination of the Biblical basis for a sacramental understanding of baptism, Barth’s discussion of the meaning of baptism proceeds on the assumption that baptism “is not to be understood as a divine work or word of grace which purifies man and renews him.” Instead, the meaning of baptism “is to be sought in its character as a true and genuine human action which responds to the divine act and word.”<sup>294</sup> He returns to the positive task of addressing the meaning of baptism with three formal statements.

Firstly, water baptism is a public washing with water, or “more properly the indication of such a washing.” Barth argues that the form that this washing takes is not essential except that it must be a perceptible, visible, concrete act.<sup>295</sup> It is differentiated from other washings, not by the form it takes, but by “the word which is spoken in it as a response to the deed of the God who acts and speaks in Jesus Christ through the Holy Ghost.”<sup>296</sup> Such a washing is public in order that “the

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<sup>293</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 128.

<sup>294</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 128. Barth allows that this might be called a Neo-Zwinglian perspective with the following reservations: While Barth’s view is similar to Zwingli in that it excludes sacramental interpretations of baptism, Barth maintains that he has laid “the foundation more carefully,” critiquing these views biblically and theologically rather than from the perspective of the philosophical idea that “an external thing cannot do an internal work.” Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 128. Noting that Zwingli grounds baptism in John the Baptist and the Old Testament sign of circumcision, making it “a sign of loyalty which marks all members of the covenant people,” Barth argues that Zwingli fails to elucidate the meaning of baptism as a human word or work, and that his opposition to the Catabaptists gives the impression that “infant baptism must be accepted at all costs as the shibboleth of the *corpus mixtum* of the people of God.” As a result, Barth suggests that it is quite understandable that Zwingli’s sterile baptismal teaching has largely been replaced by Calvin’s “cognitive sacramentalism.” Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 129–30.

<sup>295</sup> As such, it is “a rough and approximate, though recognisable, reflection of the divine act to which, as a human action, it looks back, from which it comes, to which it looks forward and towards which it also moves.”

<sup>296</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 130.

participants guarantee to themselves and one another it has taken place, and may be invoked in support of this fact.”<sup>297</sup>

Further reinforcing the ecclesial context of baptism, Barth’s second formal statement is that baptism is a social event in which both the one baptising and the one baptized participate in the life of the Christian community. Barth argues that the action of the one baptising and the one baptized “is to be understood and taken seriously as something in which the Christian community as such, the broader, total community represented by the minister and candidate, is present and at work.” Being represented by the minister and candidate, the community is present and at work in faith, love, hope and responsibility, such that “the body of Christ appears, and engages in witness to the world, in a new form.”<sup>298</sup>

Thirdly, Barth notes that all of the participants in baptism must be acting freely, rather than “under a compulsion which restricts or destroys [their] spontaneity or responsibility.” For Barth, baptism “is a human reflection of the cleansing and renewal willed and executed by God.” God’s act of cleansing and renewal in Christ frees a person for obedience so that they “may now do that which corresponds” to God’s act of salvation, may now do that which corresponds “to the fact that God himself has elected them in freedom, that he has acted for them and acts upon them in this free election.” In order for baptism to be a step “which does justice to the free, fatherly turning of God to them, the act of baptism must have for all concerned the character of a genuine human decision.”<sup>299</sup>

As a result, Barth argues that baptism must not be obligatory and enforced, or be an event in which the baptized are “fundamentally no more than instruments and objects,” whether in the form of “a destiny to which they must adapt themselves,” or in “subjection to a controlling sociological mechanism.” Acknowledging that questions of what guarantees the freedom of a person in entering baptism, Barth suggests that the only answer that can be given to these questions is that the candidate and community entrust themselves to God as they venture

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<sup>297</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 130.

<sup>298</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 131.

<sup>299</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 132–33.

baptism: “God is the stronghold in which the community and its baptismal candidates may and should do with certainty that which they do.”<sup>300</sup>

### 2.2.4.3 The conversion of candidate and community

Approaching the material question of “what is willed, done, and established by those who take part in” baptism, Barth describes the act of the participants of baptism as “an act of obedience and hope”<sup>301</sup> which responds and corresponds to the command and promise which come from God in the form of the work and word of God in the history of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Barth suggests that the concept of “conversion” comprehends most clearly the one human action which constitutes the meaning of baptism, and of which obedience and hope are two terms.

In the first place, Barth notes that baptism is the conversion of candidate and community to each other. Being “confessed and acknowledged as a member of the community,” the candidate and community are both “engaged in leaving an old path and entering upon a new.” This is a path of mutual obligation and service where the congregation has an obligation to “share with [the baptized] its whole gift and task” even as the one baptized has entered into obligation to the community and its members.<sup>302</sup>

Secondly, baptism is the conversion of both the community and candidate to God, the turning of both candidate and community from the “old way of self-will and anxiety... to enter upon and tread the new way of obedience and hope.”<sup>303</sup> Barth explains that when by baptism a person

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<sup>300</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 132–33.

<sup>301</sup>Again, Barth notes that God’s response of receiving, approving and responding to baptism “does not take place in and with the event as such,” and so is not constitutive of the meaning of the act of baptism itself,” again remarking that the question of what constitutes its character as Christian baptism from the standpoint of the human action must be understood in “strict correlation and a no less strict distinction between the human action as such and the divine action from which it springs, on whose basis it is possible, and towards which it moves.” Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 134.

<sup>302</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 136. As a result, the one baptized “is in solidarity with [the community] in victory and defeat, in honour and shame, inwardly as well as outwardly.”

<sup>303</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 136.

confirms before God, the world, and their conscience that they have turned from an old way and toward a new, the community is called to participate in this turning.<sup>304</sup> As the community summons the candidate to obedience and hope, so also the candidate summons the community to this same obedience and hope, calling the community to renewal or even “to become in a wholly new way the community of hope which lives by the divine promise.” As the concrete form of conversion, in the administration of baptism “community and candidate make open affirmation together that they will stride on into the future in obedience to God and hope in him.”<sup>305</sup>

Barth differentiates this understanding of baptism as the conversion of candidate and community from “moral rearmament.”<sup>306</sup> He argues that baptism is greater, deeper and stronger than an intellectual, ethical and religious change of mind, not because of a divine work of grace and revelation taking place invisibly within it, but because baptism is conversion to God rather than to an ideology, doctrine, or teaching. The conversion of baptism is not based on any idea, principle, or ideology which may or may not be given the title “God,” but rather in the knowledge of the concrete work and word of God in the history of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The new which is visibly entered upon in baptism is that of a person justifying God, of deciding “to let God be God, to let him be his God, and his precisely.”<sup>307</sup> Such a conversion is not so much a change of lordship as it is “a turning aside from all pretended claims to lordship” in recognition that God alone truly is Lord. Such a conversion is a person abandoning all their previous judgments “to the judgment of God, who is certainly in the right, not only against them but also for them.”<sup>308</sup> Taking the accounts of those who came to John for baptism as exemplary, Barth suggests that the conversion at issue in baptism “consists

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<sup>304</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 137. “In undertaking to baptize her, to acknowledge her as a new member, it has every reason to accept solidarity with her, to associate itself with her in her turning from that old path, in realizing afresh that this is a new path which it has left, which is closed and barred to it.”

<sup>305</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 138.

<sup>306</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 138–39.

<sup>307</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 142. In a brief excursus Barth notes that, far from being a moral rearmament, this may take the form of a moral disarmament.

<sup>308</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 142.

quite simply in the fact that a person associates themselves with all the people and publicans who justified God.”<sup>309</sup>

While acknowledging that it is a gracious gift of God that a person is “awakened, summoned and empowered” to turn towards God and to associate oneself with all who justify God, baptism “is effected in human knowledge, thought, resolve and will” and so “is, of course, ‘only’ human.”<sup>310</sup> Against those who might accuse him of robbing baptism of its dignity as a divine means of grace, Barth insist that “an action so full of promise should not be disparaged because it is ‘merely human’,” but insists that describing baptism as a concrete form of a person’s conversion is to give it its true dignity as the most human thing a person can do:

One cannot extol and praise baptism more highly than by understanding and describing it as the concrete form of this human action, and seeking and finding its meaning in the fact that in its execution a person joins with the Christian community, and it with them, in justifying God, in confessing and declaring that they hunger and thirst after God’s righteousness. This is what the people who heard John and the publicans did when they had themselves baptized. This is what the Pharisees and lawyers failed to do. This is what is to be done in concert by community and candidate in Christian baptism.<sup>311</sup>

Barth’s connection between baptism and conversion also underlines baptism’s necessity. A person’s conversion must be of the whole person, and so cannot remain only inward but must be enacted by the whole person in the visible human sphere. In baptism, as a concrete and visible act, “a person confesses not only before God but also before the community and all people that, humbly awaiting its confirmation by God,” they will accept God’s judgment and desire “to be

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<sup>309</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 143, 140.

<sup>310</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 143.

<sup>311</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 143–44.



justified only by God's loving-kindness."<sup>312</sup> Through this act of baptism, candidate and community create an irreversible and indisputable fact within the life of the candidate and the community which "denotes, though it does not create, the distinction between an old way which has been forsaken and a new way which has been entered upon."<sup>313</sup> Appealing again to the Synoptic accounts of John the Baptist, Barth notes that "the people which heard John and the publicans neither could nor would nor did refrain from confirming their conversion to God by having themselves baptized. Their baptism was the public and binding fulfillment of their conversion to God. Their conversion to God was the meaning of their baptism."<sup>314</sup>

Barth reinforces the necessity of the concrete, visible, public nature of baptism by returning to the distinction between baptism and "all the other relatively significant human changes, decisions and conversions." Having already stated that the distinction is rooted in baptism as conversion to God, Barth further specifies that baptism is conversion to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to the covenanting God who has, does, and will act and speak in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, rather than being conversion to an "indefinite concept of God," to the god of human religion, the gods of the philosophers, or anything "which might present or commend itself as God to general thought."<sup>315</sup> The command that conversion obeys, the promise that conversion grasps in hope, is the command and promise of Jesus Christ. As obedience to Jesus Christ, as hope in him, conversion cannot be simply a matter of a person's heart and conscience. The kingdom of God that has come in Jesus Christ is a "world-change", and is "*eo ipso* to be to be proclaimed as such from the rooftops" by those who are aware of it (Mt 10.27).<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>312</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 144. Being a human act carried out in the visible human sphere, baptism can not anticipate God's confirmation and acceptance of a person's conversion, yet Barth suggests that baptism can be enacted "in expectation of the divine judgment of this conversion... with the joy of humility before him alone who can be and is the Judge in this matter."

<sup>313</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 145. "Whether this fact will later speak for or against the candidate, for or against the community, they have in any case introduced it into their lives, and they no longer stop it speaking to them as such."

<sup>314</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 145.

<sup>315</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 146.

<sup>316</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 147.

According to Barth, in baptism both candidate and community venture a confession of faith in Jesus Christ, obeying Christ's command and grasping his promise, each hearing and responding to the confession of the other. In baptism a person publicly identifies with all others who confess Jesus Christ without concern for similarities or natural affinities, and expresses a desire to be recognized by these others regardless of "whether she is close to them in other things or not, whether she likes them or not."<sup>317</sup> Responding to this desire, trusting a person's confession of faith, the community "obeys the command of Jesus Christ and grasps his promise by baptising this person, by accepting her knowledge and confession as valid, not merely for to-day but also for to-morrow, by publicly acknowledging her as a member, by declaring solidarity with her in sisterly union."<sup>318</sup> This public confession and recognition does not need to be repeated. Thus, while baptism is only the first step which a particular person and the Christian community take together after which other steps must follow, Barth argues that, as this first and exemplary, baptism cannot be repeated.<sup>319</sup> While acknowledging that many steps of both candidate and community precede and prepare for the event of baptism, Barth suggests that these are provisional and non-obligatory steps. For Barth, baptism is unique as the event in which "looking at Jesus Christ becomes necessary instead of contingent, fixed instead of vacillating, in which faith becomes solid in spite of unbelief, in which it rings out as a person's response, in which their conversion becomes an event which is visible to God and irrevocable, an irreversible event."<sup>320</sup>

Barth concludes this section of his discussion by briefly touching on the issue of baptismal preparation. He insists that there should be no barriers and fences which might make "the entry to baptism difficult and obscure," such as secret practices and disciplines or "by religious and moral rules, statutes and conditions which the candidate has to fulfill. Instead, a person's preparation for baptism should be a narration of the acts of God oriented to their future baptism

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<sup>317</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 147.

<sup>318</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 148.

<sup>319</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 150–51.

<sup>320</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 151.

so that “they should have been set in a position and in readiness so to seek and desire baptism that they know what they are doing in the matter.” Barth argues that baptism should follow such preparation “as quickly and meaningfully as possible, that the recipient of the instruction should take the first binding and irrevocable step, that he should venture to be baptized on his own decision and responsibility.”<sup>321</sup>

#### 2.2.4.4 Baptism as a free and responsible human act

Having described baptism as the conversion of both candidate and community, Barth continues his discussion by giving a “clear picture of the free and responsible human act” which takes place in baptism.<sup>322</sup>

Barth begins by describing baptism as an “act of obedience made in free responsibility” to a command “issued specifically to the community and its candidate.”<sup>323</sup> In contrast to submission to a ceremonial duty or rite, he argues that baptism “brings to light the freedom of those who are bound by and in and to Jesus Christ” which characterizes the whole of the Christian life.<sup>324</sup> In an excursus Barth takes up the question of “whether a person can become, be, or be called a Christian in the full sense without being baptized.” Barth insists that, while situations which make Christian baptism impossible do not prevent one from being a true Christian, a Christian will never be content with such highly abnormal situations and will therefore continue to desire water baptism.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>321</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 152.

<sup>322</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 152–53. Barth suggests that in this respect his account of baptism is superior to sacramental interpretations of baptism with “either make arbitrary conjectures of one kind or another or they are reduced to silence before a mystery which is to be treated with reverence.”

<sup>323</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 153. While this command was formulated in Matthew 28.19, it was “properly promulgated when Jesus desired baptism, and had himself baptism, at the hands of John.”

<sup>324</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 154.

<sup>325</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 155–58.

As a conversion, Barth suggests that baptism is an act of renunciation and pledge, a turning away from an old way of life and a turning towards a new way. As such a free human act, however, it is essentially responsive, responding and corresponding to the divine change that has taken place for humanity in Jesus Christ; it is a renunciation and a pledge which acknowledges and proclaims the renunciation and pledge of God, God's No and God's Yes to humanity, accomplished and revealed in Jesus Christ as the justification and sanctification of sinful humanity.<sup>326</sup> In baptism the candidate knows their own sin and guilt as forgiven sin and pardoned guilt in Jesus Christ, with the result that the candidates continuation in these is "rendered impossible by what Jesus Christ has done and is" for them.<sup>327</sup> In baptism both candidate and community "can and should accept, answer, confirm and repeat" God's Yes to humanity which God spoke in Jesus Christ, in whom their lives are hid.<sup>328</sup>

As both renunciation and pledge baptism which responds and corresponds to the divine change effected for humanity in "the history of Jesus Christ and baptism with the Holy Ghost."<sup>329</sup> Barth suggests that decision to enter baptism is not a choice between two equally open possibilities, but is instead the choice of "that which is alone actual and possible" and a renunciation of all impossibilities, including "the idea of the pagan *liberum arbitrium*, which is illusory because it contests the one true reality, and which, as foreseen already in Gen 3.5, makes humanity equal to God, the judge between good and evil."<sup>330</sup> Nevertheless, Barth insists that baptism is a human decision in which human beings are not passed over, crowded out, replaced or made irrelevant:

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<sup>326</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 159.

<sup>327</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 159. Making reference to Romans 6.4 and Colossians 2.12, Barth explains that baptism, like burial, is a "renunciation of the deceased"; Their old selves as legalistic or libertine sinners having "died when Jesus Christ died on the cross," these can now only be buried and renounced by both community and candidate in baptism. Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 160.

<sup>328</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 161. "Candidate and community confess together that the total renewal of humanity which has taken place in Jesus Christ is their own renewal, their own sanctification for God, not as their work but as his, not as a self-sanctification which they have undertaken or are preparing to undertake, but as the sanctification for God which has come to them, as to all people, in Jesus Christ."

<sup>329</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 162.

<sup>330</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 162.

Those who participate in baptism are summoned, empowered, and in the full sense ordered by God to take the decision as such. Hence they are not engulfed and covered as by a divine landslide or swept away as by a divine flood. They are taken seriously as God's partners. At issue is their own answer to his work and word, a joyful and confident answer which is to be given quite voluntarily and with full awareness of what is entailed... Matters are not decided over their heads. They are not just objects who are discussed, moved and pushed around. Precisely in the covenant of grace, the house of the Father, the kingdom of Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost, there can be no talk of divine omnicausality.<sup>331</sup>

Observing that his understanding of baptism as a “wholly free, conscious and voluntary decision” is incompatible with infant baptism, Barth notes that this widespread practice renders a fuller discussion of the meaning of baptism as a human decision necessary.<sup>332</sup> The discussion of the question of infant baptism is merely an excursus in Barth's larger argument, however, and so my summary of it here will be brief.

Barth begins by noting that his description of baptism as renunciation and pledge corresponds to that which is found “in the New Testament period and for some time afterwards.” The baptism of John, and of Jesus by John, involved the will and free decision of those baptized, and the accounts of Acts portray a similar picture: “The baptized as well as the baptisers knew what they were doing when they had themselves baptized. They asked for baptism.”<sup>333</sup> Barth notes that the picture of baptism that can be drawn from the historical records of the second to fifth century reveal a shift so that there is less and less correspondence with the event at the Jordan. In

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<sup>331</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 163.

<sup>332</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 163–64. Nevertheless, Barth concedes that a consideration of the arguments made in favour of such an “astonishing possibility” is forced on him because it is such a widespread practice. Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 166. On the early history of baptism, Barth directs the reader to J Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (London: SCM, 1960) and, in response, Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* (London: SCM, 1963).

<sup>333</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 164.

particular, Barth explains that as candidates for baptism were increasingly drawn from children of the Christian community rather than from the pagan world,

there triumphed the idea of a specific circle of human beings who, as the physical progeny of people now called Christians, could and should be baptized unhesitatingly without asking concerning their desire or their own decision, as though it were simply a matter of disposing of them and marking them at will.<sup>334</sup>

The problem with this development of baptismal practice is that it makes the one baptized merely an object of the community's action, removing any role for them as a subject: "There can be no question of any renunciation and pledge as the act of her own free decision... She is not a subject, and baptism cannot be understood seriously as a common work."<sup>335</sup>

Barth observes that justification for the "astonishing possibility" of infant baptism was only articulated at the time of the Reformation. The Reformers sought to retain the practice, but having rejected the papacy, the simple facticity of infant baptism was insufficient basis for it and so that the Reformers developed apologetic and polemical arguments to defend the practice.<sup>336</sup>

Barth takes up a number of the arguments that he judges to be the most common contemporary justifications for infant baptism. Acknowledging that infant baptism is not expressly forbidden in the New Testament, Barth notes that neither is infant baptism expressly permitted or commanded, and that the "few but clear accounts of baptisms at the time.... definitely do not refer to baptism of this kind."<sup>337</sup> Briefly discussing the baptism narratives in Acts, Barth notes

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<sup>334</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 165.

<sup>335</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 165.

<sup>336</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 167. Barth discusses the traditional justifications that the reformers gave for the practice of infant baptism, noting that their discussions of infant baptism were not prepared for in their general doctrine of baptism or in their theology as a whole, were defended "with suspicious heat and irritation," entangled them in contradictions of their own premises, and ultimately failed to prove that which needed to be proven. Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 169–79.

<sup>337</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 179.

that even the verses which speak of the baptism of whole houses or households, in which there may have been infants, present baptism as part of the sequence preaching-faith-baptism.<sup>338</sup>

Barth notes that New Testament language of becoming as little children is obviously a figure of speech rather than a reference to infant baptism, and observes that while little children are included in the reach of God's work in the history of Jesus Christ, it is not until they can hear and see, when they come to years of discretion, that they may be summoned to the obedience of faith.<sup>339</sup> While insisting that reactions to Jesus which children may have should be taken with seriousness, Barth insists these should not be confused with the movement of faith and obedience with which the Christian life begins.<sup>340</sup>

While acknowledging that the New Testament “does provide for the singling out of children who are born and brought up in the community of Jesus Christ,” and that these children share in the faith, prayer, and witness of the community, Barth insists that “no one is a true and living member” of the community of Jesus “merely by living in its midst,” not even children born and brought up within this community:

The Christian life cannot be inherited as blood, gifts, characteristics and inclinations are inherited. No Christian environment, however genuine or sincere, can transfer this life to those who are in this environment. For these, too, the Christian life will and can begin only on the basis of their own liberation by God, their own decision.<sup>341</sup>

Responding to frequent appeals to Acts 2.39, Barth argues that the promise which is given “to you and to your children” is a universal promise which calls all to repent and be baptized, rather

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<sup>338</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 180.

<sup>339</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 180–81. Barth notes that when the little children are brought to Jesus, he touches them but does not summon them to the discipleship.

<sup>340</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 182–83.

<sup>341</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 184.

than a justification of the baptism of the children of Christian parents.<sup>342</sup> Commenting also on 1 Cor. 7.14, Barth concludes that there is no more cause for children of Christian parents to be baptized than for a non-Christian spouse to be baptized on the basis of the confession of their Christian partner.<sup>343</sup>

In addition to these exegetical arguments, Barth also addresses the dogmatic question of the relationship of baptism with the faith of the one baptized. Barth acknowledges that “we all live by the faith of others which is directed to us and which intercedes us,” but argues that, while the faith of others supports and sustains our faith, it does not take its place or displace it. Noting that, as the *ἀρχηγὸς τῆς πίστεως* (Heb. 12.2), Jesus Christ “empowers us for our own faith, and summons us to it,” Barth insists that “since we ourselves are freed to believe, believing is something which no one else with his faith can do for us.”<sup>344</sup>

Barth also addresses the possibility of there being some actual yet primitive faith existing in the baptized infant, arguing that even if the presence of such faith is accepted, the expressed desire and confession before God and the community on the part of the infant is still lacking.<sup>345</sup> As a result, Barth suggests that infant baptism needs supplementation by the rite of confirmation if it is not to be left as a half-baptism, though noting that the “freedom and sincerity” of confirmation is often compromised “by the fact that it is not spontaneously desired by those who perform it but automatically falls due at a specific age or stage, when, no less than baptism itself, it is simply the fulfillment of a general custom, which in the last resort is not even an ecclesiastical but a civil custom.”<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>342</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 184.

<sup>343</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 185.

<sup>344</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 186. In an excursus Barth notes that Tertullian already made an argument along these lines in *De baptismo*, where he opposed “the tendency towards infant baptism which was already emerging at the end of the 2nd century at least in Carthage.” Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 187.

<sup>345</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 187.

<sup>346</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 189. In spite of the doubtful, questionable and irregular character of infant baptism, Barth argues that it should be considered valid and not repeated.



Barth also takes up the argument that infant baptism is a “remarkably vivid a depiction of the free and omnipotent grace of God which is independent of all human thought and will, faith and unbelief,” noting that a similar argument would justify the forced baptism of adults, and should also entail the admission of infants to the Lord’s Supper.<sup>347</sup> Furthermore, Barth notes that God’s gift of the Spirit to those baptized as infants does not prove that God approves of the practice, insisting that God may accompany and bless the Church in spite of its errors and faults: “From the fact that God accompanies and blesses [the Church] on its erroneous ways, may one conclude that these ways are pleasing to God and that it can and should continue to walk in them?”<sup>348</sup>

Finally, Barth notes that the dangers of Pharisaical perfectionism that might arise with the practice of “responsible baptism” is not an argument against it. Noting that danger is not an adequate counter-argument, Barth suggests that some of the dangers associated with “responsible baptism” can be met by ensuring that the criteria of baptism is simply “the discernible integrity of a person’s free decision and confession,” rather than certainty of a candidate’s “faith, regeneration, conversion, or spiritual endowment.”<sup>349</sup> As Barth sees it, the primary danger faced by those practicing responsible baptism is the danger of relying on their faith rather than on Christ. Noting Luther’s distinction between believing unto baptism and being baptized into faith, between having faith and relying on faith,” Barth concludes his discussion of infant baptism by suggesting that

those who advocate responsible baptism — and fundamentally the Baptists and Mennonites are on the right track in their baptismal practice — cannot let themselves be reminded too often that Luther brings to light here something well worth pondering and a distinction which has to be taken seriously.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 190.

<sup>348</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 190.

<sup>349</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 192.

<sup>350</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 193.

After this rather lengthy detour to discuss the question of infant baptism, Barth returns to his positive task of describing baptism from the standpoint of its meaning. Having discussed baptism as obedience and as renunciation and pledge, Barth now takes up the theme of baptism as hope. Referring back to his discussion of the goal of baptism, Barth describes baptism as a human action “which is wholly referred and oriented to its appointed goal, which moves towards this goal, which is bound to this goal, which is determined by this goal.” Jesus Christ being the goal of baptism, baptism is undertaken in hope in Jesus Christ as the one who promises and who fulfills the promise.<sup>351</sup>

Commenting on Romans 6.1-11 and 2 Cor 5.17, Barth explains that the future towards which those entering baptism move is one of a future likeness of Christ’s resurrection, “a new life in the power of the resurrection.”<sup>352</sup> Christian hope is a living hope because its object, content, and basis is Jesus Christ raised from the dead.<sup>353</sup> As a hope that is directed towards the “definitive and universal manifestation of Jesus Christ as the one he is” it is hope in a promise of that which is not yet seen, but it is, nevertheless, a certain hope because it is a hope moving “towards the manifestation and recognition of their own being as those they already are, as those who belong to him, as his brothers and sisters, as the saved and liberated children of God.”<sup>354</sup> On the basis of this living and certain hope, Christians are people “who humbly and joyfully wait to enter on this inheritance, and are on the way to so doing.”<sup>355</sup>

Barth further explains that this living hope is not only hope for itself, but is hope for the renewal of all things. It would, therefore, “be treachery against their living hope” if a Christian were to live as if their life were oriented toward their own participation and enjoyment of the coming manifestation of Jesus Christ. Explaining that the manifestation of Jesus Christ will be the

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<sup>351</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 196. “He is their hope as they enter the way together, bound to him and therefore to one another as well. He is their hope as they do what they do in baptism. It is as those who hope in him that they can and will do what they do there.”

<sup>352</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 197.

<sup>353</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 197.

<sup>354</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 198.

<sup>355</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 198.

manifestation of “the new heaven and the new earth... the glorification of the cosmos in the new form given to it by its reconciliation with God,” and the “fulfillment of the will of God that all people should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2.4),” Barth insists that Christian hope is a hope which “sighs for the fulfillment of the promise” of radical renewal (Rom. 8.19f).<sup>356</sup>

In view of this, Barth suggests that baptism is “a consecration or ordination to take part in the mission which is committed to the whole Church.”<sup>357</sup> Barth insists that the baptized community is the “missionary Church which is sent out into the world or not at all.” It does not exist for itself, but has a “proleptic and prophetic ministry of making known to the world, to those who are still outside, that which is given to those inside in the form of knowledge which is provisional and yet which is genuine and certain for all that.” As the work of this missionary community, Barth suggests that each baptism is a declaration of God’s love for the world, of “God’s universal will of grace and salvation.”<sup>358</sup> And this missionary hope is the hope of the one baptized as well. Therefore, baptism is a consecration or ordination to participate in the mission of the Church in that, through baptism, a person takes up the mission of the community and becomes “personally co-responsible for the execution of the missionary command which constitutes the community, of the commission to the outside world which surrounds both it and him on a large scale and a small scale alike.”<sup>359</sup>

Barth explains that it is baptism as hope which answers the difficulty which follow from baptism as renunciation and pledge, i.e. the difficulty that neither candidate nor community can guarantee that the renunciation and pledge enacted in baptism will, indeed, be followed by a life

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<sup>356</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 199. “It yearns that the good news and promise which are entrusted to Christians should be proclaimed to it, to every creature (Mk. 16.15).”

<sup>357</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 200–01. Barth comments further: “They cannot be consecrated, ordained, or dedicated a second, third, or fourth time without devaluation of their baptism. He who has ears to hear, let him hear (and not just in the Roman Catholic world)!”

<sup>358</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 200.

<sup>359</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 200–01.

characterized by similar steps of renunciation and pledge.<sup>360</sup> As hope, baptism is “a human action in which the participants look beyond themselves and what they do into the future.”<sup>361</sup> However, the goal of baptism being Jesus Christ himself, baptism is not hope in the goodness of the future actions of those participating in baptism but is hope in Jesus Christ and what he will do. It is because it is hope in Jesus Christ who accompanies them and guarantees their future, in Jesus Christ as “the Lord, Comforter and Helper of his people in the life which follows baptism,” that baptism can be ventured: “The Christian life which begins with baptism can thus be a life in which they are not alone and left to their own devices with all the very dubious things which are certainly to be expected on their side.”<sup>362</sup>

Barth explains, however, that Christian hope is not a passive waiting but is active in prayer. Baptism is hope as it is an act of prayer of both the baptising community and those baptized that Jesus Christ “will answer and be responsible for them, i.e. for the whole ocean of mistakes both after and already in baptism.”<sup>363</sup> And while this prayer is made in assurance of the one to whom it is addressed, it remains a petition. In contrast to cheap grace “which may be counted on in advance, the grace which is disposable, the grace which is waiting to be taken and used by man...the receiving of his grace in its full reality is only there, but really there, where it is desired of him, sought of him, asked of him.”<sup>364</sup>

Barth concludes that in venturing this prayer the participants in baptism “do neither too little nor too much,” and that “where there is prayer, humanity’s relationship to God is corrected and it is

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<sup>360</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 204–05. Far from it. To the contrary, Barth asks: “Like all human enterprises...is not Christian baptism itself compromised and denied, and not just confirmed, by what follows?...What if baptism, not merely in relation to the future but in itself, was too bold a venture?” Rejecting the argument that baptism is simply obedience to God’s word rather than a human venture, and as such can be judged by God alone, as an evasion which reduces baptism to its basis, Barth argues that it is baptism as hope which answers these concerns. Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 205–06.

<sup>361</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 206.

<sup>362</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 207.

<sup>363</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 208.

<sup>364</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 209.

in order.”<sup>365</sup> Noting that such a view of baptism excludes both “calculating manipulation of God’s grace” as well as “any uncertainty as to its being given,” Barth concludes that baptism is a prayer of hope in which candidate and community lets

God be God but they let him be their God, who has called them and to whom they may call in return, who hears them and is heard as they may hear him, and, hearing, obey him. Because and to the degree that baptism is prayer, it is at once a very humble and a very bold action, free from all illusions and profoundly sober, yet bold and heaven-storming.<sup>366</sup>

Barth concludes the baptism fragment with a brief exegetical excursus outlining the biblical evidence for understanding baptism as prayer.<sup>367</sup> His discussion of 1 Peter 3.21 is particularly important because Barth views this passage as the only baptismal verse in the New Testament that “is a description of baptism not unlike a definition.”<sup>368</sup> Barth argues that, describing baptism as “a request of God for a good conscience” rather than as “a putting away of the filth of the flesh,” 1 Peter clearly rejects a sacramental understanding of baptism. To the contrary, baptism is described as a human act of request and petition, and as such is itself an *epiclesis*, a calling on the name of the Lord. Barth observes that the content of this petition is for a good conscience, “a being in harmony with God,” connecting this with the broader context of 1 Peter by noting that “this is what Christians need for well-doing, for witness among the heathen, for patience in maltreatment at their hands, for the building of that spiritual house.” Barth’s taking up of 1 Peter’s reference to Noah and the ark nicely summarizes his understanding of baptism:

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<sup>365</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 210.

<sup>366</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 210.

<sup>367</sup> He suggests that in Luke’s account, Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan was defined materially as his prayer, as was the baptism of Saul who became Paul, and that 1 Peter 3.21 points in a similar direction: “Baptism doth save you, not as the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but as the request of God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

<sup>368</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 211.

The human work of baptism is the request for [a being in harmony with God], the petition that God will create and give it to those who ask and pray for it. As this *ἐπερώτημα συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς* baptism is itself a good and saving human work comparable to the saving human work of building the ark. In the light of their baptism Christians can regard themselves as saved, and they can be comforted and admonished thereby, since baptism is an asking and praying which is empowered and set in motion by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and as such it is the proper counter-avouchment of Christians to the avouchment of the Lord that he will be their God.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>369</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 212–13.

### 3 Baptism with the Holy Spirit

The distinction between baptism with water and baptism with the Spirit is foundational for Barth's doctrine of baptism, and it is also one of the aspects whose exegetical grounding has been strongly criticized. It has been asserted by a number of scholars that Barth's distinguishing of Spirit-baptism and water-baptism is too sharp, reflecting a problematic dualism in his thought. Barth's making such a separation is thought to derive from his philosophical or theological presuppositions rather than from his reading of the Biblical text.<sup>370</sup>

As noted in the previous chapter, Barth discusses the exegetical grounding of his discussion of baptism with the Holy Spirit in a relatively brief excursus. He begins his discussion of baptism with the Holy Spirit by noting that "the word 'baptism' denotes an act of cleansing," and suggesting that as "the cleansing and reorientation of a man by the endowment and work of the Holy Spirit," baptism with the Holy Spirit is a baptism "which only God himself, or the Son of God sent by him, the Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the world, can accomplish."<sup>371</sup> Barth's view is that baptism with the Holy Spirit is the endowment and work of the Holy Spirit which gives "a new determination of the one baptized," and that it is to be sharply distinguished from the baptism with water that humans can give.<sup>372</sup>

John Yocum suggests that there is an artificiality in Barth's distinction between water-baptism and Spirit-baptism as two moments in one event, observing that "Barth's doctrine of the two strictly distinguished actions of two agents relies on a corresponding distinction between baptism

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<sup>370</sup>See chapter 1. See also Lampe's comment that "Pauline thought affords no ground whatever for the modern theories which seek to effect a separation in the one action and to distinguish a 'Spirit-baptism' and a 'water-baptism,' not as the inward and outward parts of one sacrament, but as independent entities." G.W.H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers*, 2nd edn. (London: SPCK, 1967), 57. For Dunn's response to Lampe, see James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM, 1970), 130

<sup>371</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 30.

<sup>372</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 30.

with water and baptism in the Holy Spirit which is found in Mark 1:8 (IV/4, 30).<sup>373</sup> Yocum argues that this “impression of artificiality is difficult to overcome, especially since the actual term ‘baptism in the Spirit’ occurs only in Mark 1:8 and Acts 1:5; and Barth has already ruled out the narrative passages in Acts - which on the whole suggest an identification of baptism with water and baptism in the Spirit - as unilluminating for the meaning of baptism.” He concludes: “Given the weight of the tradition of interpretation Barth is resisting, if his exegetical case is to be convincing, it would need to be much more clear-cut and more reliant on the straightforward meaning of passages that relate to baptism.”<sup>374</sup> These comments invite an examination of the texts to which Barth makes reference in his brief excursus on baptism with the Holy Spirit, as well as well as an examination of the claim that the narrative passages of Acts suggest an identification of baptism with water and baptism in the Spirit.

These two tasks are not as distinct as might first appear. In addition to Mark 1.8 and parallels, three references in Acts are included in the list of texts to which Barth makes reference in his discussion of baptism with the Holy Spirit: 1 Cor 12.13; Jn 1.33; Ac 1.5; Ac 11.16; Ac 19.2f. Assessing Barth’s interpretation of these passages is somewhat difficult, however, because he does not discuss these passages in any detail, simply listing the references in support of his discussion of baptism with the Spirit.<sup>375</sup> In view of the brevity of Barth’s exegesis, the following discussion is not so much an assessment of Barth’s understanding of these passages as it is a supplement to Barth’s work, a proposal for how the “straightforward meaning” of these passages can be seen to support Barth’s conclusions.

My primary interlocutor in this chapter is James Dunn, who has been a central figure in the discussion of the baptism in the Spirit in the New Testament since the publication of his *Baptism in the Spirit*.<sup>376</sup> Dunn has most recently addressed the issue at hand in the two published volumes

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<sup>373</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 164.

<sup>374</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 164

<sup>375</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*. Barth’s understanding of John’s baptism will be discussed in the next chapter, but for now the focus is on the coming baptism with Holy Spirit and fire of which John spoke.

<sup>376</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*.



of his *Christianity in the Making, Jesus Remembered* and *Beginning in Jerusalem*.<sup>377</sup> Dunn's work is useful in that he interacts with a broad range of contemporary scholarship, and his discussion is set in the context of an inquiry into the origins of Christianity more broadly. Dunn, I suggest, presents a compelling argument that the New Testament clearly distinguishes baptism with water and baptism with the Spirit as separate events carried out by distinct agents. The argument of this chapter addresses three significant exegetical loci, 1) John the Baptist's announcement in Mark 1.8 and parallels; 2) The accounts of baptism in Acts; 3) 1 Corinthians 12.13.

### 3.1 Mark 1.8 and parallels

I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (and fire)

The first exegetical locus for this chapter is Mark 1.8 and parallels, which Barth identifies as “the basic text” concerning baptism in the Holy Spirit.<sup>378</sup> In this text, John tells those coming to be

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<sup>377</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). Additional important works by Dunn include: James D. G. Dunn, “The Birth of a Metaphor: Baptized in the Spirit,” *Expository Times* 89, no. 5 (F 1978): 134–38; James D. G. Dunn, “John the Baptist's Use of Scripture,” in *The Christ and the Spirit, Volume 2: Pneumatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 118–30; James D. G. Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire Baptism,” in *The Christ and the Spirit. II. Pneumatology*, J.D.G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 93–102; James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Essays in Honour of R.E.O. White*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 294–310.

<sup>378</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 31. While John 1.33 (He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit) is, strictly speaking, not a parallel to Mark 1.8, this account of John's words concerning another who would baptize with the Holy Spirit is close enough to be considered a parallel for the purpose of the present argument. In addition to the works of Dunn, works consulted with respect to this locus include three commentaries to which Yocum appeals in criticizing Barth's position (Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. Hooker's perspective is further developed in Morna D. Hooker, “John's Baptism: A Prophetic Sign,” in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honour of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. Graham Stanton, Bruce Longenecker, and Stephen Barton [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 22–40. Other works consulted include three essays from a relatively recent collection of essays relating to baptism in the New Testament (Edward W. Burrows, “Baptism in Mark and Luke,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Essays in Honour of R.E.O. White*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross

baptized by him that a stronger one is coming after him who will baptize, not in water, but in the Holy Spirit and fire: “I baptize(d) you with/in water ... he (the one to come) will baptize you in/with Holy Spirit (and fire).”<sup>379</sup> Yocum challenges Barth’s interpretation of this text, claiming that “the most natural interpretation of Mark 1:8 is that the phrase indicates the distinction between Christian baptism and the baptism of John.” According to Yocum, “the predominant view among commentators, whether they find continuity or contrast emphasized, is that the verse applies to the relation between John’s baptism and Christian baptism, not to forms or ‘moments’ of Christian baptism.”<sup>380</sup>

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[Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 99–115 and John Nolland, “‘In Such a Manner It is Fitting for Us to Fulfil All Righteousness’: Reflections on the Place of Baptism in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R.E.O. White*, ed. Stanley F. Porter and Anthony R. Cross [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 63–80, Joel B. Green, “From ‘John’s Baptism’ to ‘Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus’: The Significance of Baptism in Luke-Acts,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 157–72), works specifically dealing with the identity and mission of John the Baptist (Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist Within Second Temple Judaism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991], John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume Two: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* [New York: Doubleday, 1994], as well as a selection of commentaries (John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], W.D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988], R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989], D.A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, 1993], Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Matthew* [Macon: Smythe & Helwys, 2006], Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible [New York: Doubleday, 2000], Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, Anchor Bible [Garden City: Doubleday, 1981], John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, 1989], Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997]).

<sup>379</sup>Arguing that the original form of the Baptist’s words is not important for the argument concerning whether the language of baptism is metaphorical, Dunn uses this formulation. Dunn’s view of the matter is that “Spirit and fire” was probably the original form of the Baptist’s words. James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 304. See also James D. G. Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire Baptism”. Barth’s view is that Spirit is original, and that “and fire” was an exegetical addition. Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 31.

<sup>380</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 164 n. 78 Here Yocum refers to Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, 73–74; Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 49–51; Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 37–43.

This claim is somewhat puzzling. In the first place, Barth does not claim that Mark 1.8 speaks of two moments of Christian baptism, but of two aspects of the one event which is the beginning of the Christian life. Rather than a single baptism with two moments, Barth speaks of two baptisms. Furthermore, Yocum's claim that Mk 1.8 speaks to the relationship between John's baptism and Christian baptism is not supported by his sources. To the contrary, Cranfield says that "the contrast is primarily between the persons of John and Jesus, not between John's baptism and Christian baptism."<sup>381</sup> Yocum's second source, Anderson, affirms Cranfield's point: "At all events, as Cranfield correctly observes (p.49), what is at issue here for Mark is not the *contrast* between John's baptism and Christian baptism."<sup>382</sup> While both of these scholars could be understood to be saying that there is a contrast between John's baptism and Christian baptism in Mark 1.8 but that it is not the primary focus of the text, neither scholar actually affirms that Spirit-baptism should be understood as Christian water-baptism, understood as a baptism of water and Spirit.

Yocum's third source, Morna Hooker, appears to actually reinforce *Barth's* point, in that she understands Mark 1.8 to indicate a contrast between water-baptism and Spirit-baptism, and makes no suggestion that Spirit-baptism is to be understood as referring to Christian water-baptism: "The baptism in water, symbolizing repentance, purification and preparation for the eschatological drama, is but the prelude to baptism in the Holy Spirit (*ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ*), an odd phrase which must owe its origin to this contrast."<sup>383</sup> Hooker does not speak of two aspects of one baptism, nor of distinguishing John's baptism from Christian baptism. Instead, the two baptisms in question are a baptism with water and another with Spirit. The contrast is between two mediums of baptism - one in water, and one in Spirit. Reading Mark 1:8, there is no

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<sup>381</sup> Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 49.

<sup>382</sup> Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, 74.

<sup>383</sup> Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 38. In a subsequent essay Hooker suggests "that John's baptism with water was intended, not simply as a symbol of cleansing, but as a *dramatic prophetic sign pointing to what God was about to do in a baptism with the Holy Spirit* - a pouring out of God's Spirit that would not only bring inner cleansing and punishment but would also renew his people," and argues that the Gospel of Mark is an account of Jesus "baptizing" men and women in the Holy Spirit through his ministry among them. Hooker, "John's Baptism," 26, 29-30.

artificiality to understanding baptism with water as one event, and baptism with the Holy Spirit as another event.

### 3.2 Literal and metaphorical use of the language of baptism.

Contrary to what Yocum's comments would indicate, the most natural reading of the Mark 1.8 (and parallels) is not to refer to a contrast between John's baptism and Christian baptism, but the contrast is between John's baptism with water and the baptism with the Spirit which is to come. The crux of the issue is whether John's language of a coming baptism with Spirit, by the use of the language of baptism, implies that water is involved in this coming event.

The assumption that Yocum appears to be making is that baptism with the Spirit is a baptism in water which also involves the Spirit. James Dunn has forcefully argued, however, that this is a mistaken assumption which ignores the difference between literal and metaphorical uses of the language of baptism. Explaining that literally the language of baptism means to dip, immerse, plunge, sink, drench or wash, Dunn notes that this literal use led to the development of metaphorical uses, language of baptism coming to be used to mean being immersed or overwhelmed by something, such as in Isaiah 21.4 (LXX), which speaks of "being overwhelmed by lawlessness (*ἀνομία με βαπτίζει*).<sup>384</sup> Dunn argues that such a metaphorical use of the language of baptism is a trope,

a figure where the meaning of an individual word or phrase is altered or "turned" from its conventional sense. Thus metaphor is different from 'simile,' for in a simile the words continue to bear their conventional sense, whereas in metaphor a word is used "in such a way that it means something *different* from the literal referent, but connected through some similarity."<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>384</sup>James D. G. Dunn, "'Baptized' as Metaphor," 303. On the language of baptism, see also I. Howard Marshall, "The Meaning of the Verb 'Baptize'," in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 16–18, Burrows, "Baptism in Mark and Luke," 99–100.

<sup>385</sup>James D. G. Dunn, "'Baptized' as Metaphor," 296–97. Dunn is quoting Stephen Wright, "The Voice of Jesus in Six Parables and Their Interpreters," PhD thesis (Durham University, 1997), 24–25. For an example, in Isaiah 21.4, the medium within which

That is, when baptize is used as a metaphor it means something different from its literal meaning of dipping or immersing in a liquid. For example, to speak of a person being “baptized in lawlessness” does not imply an immersion in water. Similarly, to say that someone is baptized in the Spirit can be to say that someone is immersed in the Spirit in a way that is in some way similar to a person being immersed in water, rather than to say that when they were immersed in water they were also immersed in the Spirit. A key aspect of Dunn’s argument for our discussion is his insistence that there is no reason to assume that every time the word “baptize” appears that this implies an act involving water:

To insist that John could only mean “baptize *in water*, in Spirit and in fire,” or that what he envisaged could only take place through and in immediate connection with the act of immersion (in water), would make nonsense of John’s language, and would either deny the rich associations of the language of immersion or deny the phenomenon and importance of the metaphor itself.<sup>386</sup>

Dunn’s argument is that John the Baptist coined two different ways of using the language of baptism. On the one hand, John’s distinctive practice led to baptism becoming a technical term for a particular religious rite, and on the other, John introduced the language of baptism as a way of speaking of the Spirit: “In this formative usage, John himself played immediately on the metaphorical possibilities that the imagery of ‘immerse’ opened up.”<sup>387</sup> While John baptized in water, literally immersing people in water, the coming one would not baptize in water but in the Spirit; The coming stronger one would submerge them in a river of Spirit and fire, rather than in a river of water. Dunn notes, however, that there is widespread tendency to collapse these two ways of using the language of baptism:

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one is immersed is lawlessness, rather than water; it would be rather absurd to suggest that because of the use of the term word βαπτίζει we should think of this in connection with water.

<sup>386</sup>James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 305.

<sup>387</sup>James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 303–04.

Too many commentators have in effect been captivated by the technical sense that John in effect introduced - βαπτίζω (*tbl*) as meaning ‘baptize’ (that is, in water) - and have forgotten that the term also naturally lent itself to metaphorical use. However, not least the significance of John’s coining the new usage is that in doing so he associated the new technical usage closely with an appropriate usage in the same breath.<sup>388</sup>

Dunn supports this reading of Mark 1.8 by referring to the syntax of Mark 1.8 and parallels, arguing that the syntax indicating “clearly enough that the second of the two clauses was intended in a figurative way - a kind of baptism, of course, but not a baptism ‘in water’ - rather, a different kind of baptism, ‘baptized in Spirit’.”<sup>389</sup> Furthermore, he argues for the plausibility of this interpretation, suggesting that the Baptist was developing existing metaphorical uses for the language of baptism, such as that in Isaiah 21.4 where “the imagery of immersion lent itself to use as a metaphor for succumbing to some overwhelming force or event.” Dunn draws heavily on Old Testament imagery to demonstrate that a metaphorical use of baptism as an image of submersion in a river of Spirit and fire would have been intelligible to John and his hearers. Noting that the language of God’s coming judgment in terms “a devouring fire, his breath (*πνεῦμα*) is like an overflowing stream” in Isaiah 30.27-28 parallels John’s announcement in a number of ways, Dunn suggests that Isaiah may have “provided a major stimulus to and source

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<sup>388</sup>James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 305. In “Spirit- and Water-baptism in 1 Corinthians 12.13” Anthony Cross suggests that rather than reading Mark 1.8 in terms of antithetical parallelism, it could be understood as “step parallelism,” where “the second strophe takes up the thought of the first strophe and advances the thought one additional step. As a result, the second line ... is an additional, although related, statement that brings the entire saying to its climax and completion.” R.H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teaching*, 2nd (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 29. “Thus, the coming baptism of the Spirit can be seen as the climax and fulfillment of John’s baptism rather than its antithesis.” Anthony R. Cross, “Spirit- and Water-Baptism in 1 Corinthians 12.13,” in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 131. Beyond raising it as a possibility, Cross does not present any evidence to support his reading of Mark 1.8 as step parallelism. Furthermore, it should be noted that understanding the medium of baptism to be Spirit rather than water, instead of Spirit in addition to water, does not imply that Spirit-baptism is the antithesis of water-baptism.

<sup>389</sup>James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 304.

for much of the Baptist's emphases and imagery."<sup>390</sup> He argues that John's metaphorical language of baptism with Spirit arose from the linking of these images of coming judgment with John's practice of water baptism.<sup>391</sup> According to Dunn, within the context of coming judgment, the coming one will baptize in the river of the fiery breath of God to purify and cleanse. There is no apparent reason to suppose that John envisaged that the baptism in the river of God's fiery breath would happen in conjunction with water-baptism.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>390</sup>James D. G. Dunn, "John the Baptist's Use of Scripture," 127. See also James D. G. Dunn, "'Baptized' as Metaphor," 305. I. Howard Marshall similarly identifies other Biblical material concerning imagery of fire and Spirit, concluding that "both fire and Spirit are capable of being conceived in liquid terms, and therefore both can be used in parallel with water in regard to baptism." Marshall, "The Meaning of the Verb 'Baptize,'" 16. See also Burrows, "Baptism in Mark and Luke," 104 and Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 38.

<sup>391</sup>James D. G. Dunn, "John the Baptist's Use of Scripture," 126.

<sup>392</sup>Dunn has articulated this position most recently in James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 367–68. Dunn's position is supported by a number of New Testament scholars. For example, commenting on the Matthean account, John Nolland notes that "the medium of John's baptizing activity is only water, but what is coming involves baptizing by means of the Holy Spirit and fire. Despite frequent claims to the contrary, no connection with Christian water baptism is at all evident. It is for the sake of the parallel with John's activity that this fresh activity is spoken of as baptizing: the formal parallelism underlines the material contrast." Nolland, *Matthew*, 146. See also Nolland, "'In Such a Manner,'" 70–72 and Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 151–53. It should be noted that there is an ongoing debate concerning what is meant by this coming baptism in Spirit and fire. Some, like Dunn, understand the coming baptism with Spirit and fire to be a single event of purification and judgment. See, for example, Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 473–74; Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 153–55. See also Burrows, "Baptism in Mark and Luke," 104–06, though Burrows places more emphasis on the coming event as an act of cleansing, understanding the reference to fire as an intensifying of the act such that the coming cleansing will be radical. Robert Webb, on the other hand, argues that John refers to two distinct events, a baptism in Spirit and a baptism in fire. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 289. Understanding John's words to refer to two baptisms does not negate Dunn's point that the language of baptizing with the Holy Spirit is metaphorical. Thus, Webb suggests that baptizing "with a holy spirit" "is a metaphorical description of the gracious bestowal of a holy spirit upon the repentant, that is, upon those who had responded to John's message and been baptized with his baptism." Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 292. See also Robert L. Webb, "Jesus' Baptism: Its Historicity and Implications," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10, no. 2 (2000): 281. For Webb, through baptizing in Spirit and fire the coming one will bring John's ministry to its completion, the repentant and the unrepentant each "realizing their end, whether restoration or judgment." Robert L. Webb, "John the Baptist and His Relationship to Jesus," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. B.D. Chilton and C.A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 295. For Dunn's account of this debate, see James D. G. Dunn, "Spirit-and-Fire Baptism".

### 3.3 Baptism with the Spirit in the Synoptics

Dunn's discussion of John the Baptist's words about the coming one and the coming baptism approaches the issue from the standpoint of someone asking about what John the Baptist said, what he meant by what he said, and what his hearers might have understood. While Dunn approaches these questions through the Biblical materials, acknowledging that it is "the Remembered Jesus" (and John) that we have in the Synoptic tradition, his interest tends towards the historical events to which the Biblical materials bear witness, what might be called the events "behind" the text.<sup>393</sup> This raises the possibility that while John understood the coming baptism in Spirit (and fire) in metaphorical terms, the primitive community understood them to refer to what occurs in Christian water-baptism. The following discussion looks at each of the Synoptic Gospels in order to see if there is evidence that the communities within which and for which these texts were written understood John's words concerning the coming baptism to refer to Christian baptism as a baptism with water and Spirit.

In the earlier discussion we briefly discussed Morna Hooker's treatment of Mark 1.8 in her commentary on Mark's Gospel. Hooker also takes up the question of how the Gospel writers understood John's baptism and ministry in a subsequent essay, "John's Baptism: A Prophetic Sign."<sup>394</sup> Noting the way that John's words concerning the Spirit in 1.8 are picked up in the account of the Spirit descending upon Jesus in his baptism, and in the subsequent account of Jesus' experience in the desert, Hooker suggests that Mark saw Jesus ministry as a whole as a fulfillment of John's words, that what Jesus was doing in the power of the Spirit was a "baptizing with the Spirit":

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<sup>393</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 130. While acknowledging that the Synoptic tradition contains "not Jesus himself, but the remembered Jesus," and that "the idea that we can get back to an objective historical reality, which we can wholly separate and disentangle from the disciples' memories and then use as a check and control over the way the tradition was developed during the oral and earliest written transmission, is simply unrealistic," Dunn's aim is to make his way "through the Gospels to Jesus," to "a historic Jesus, who is the legitimate and possible goal of further [historical] questing." James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 335. I am aware that this is an un-nuanced characterization of Dunn's approach, but think that it is sufficient for my purpose. For Dunn's discussion, see parts one and two of *Jesus Remembered*. For a more recent contribution to the discussion concerning historical method which interacts with a variety of scholars including Dunn, see A.J.M. Wedderburn, *Jesus and the Historians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

<sup>394</sup>Hooker, "John's Baptism."



In the light of Acts 2, commentators have tended to assume that the baptism with the Holy Spirit promised in Mark 1:8 must mean a pouring out of God's Spirit on believers, enabling them to prophesy, as foretold in Joel. But if the Holy Spirit is understood as the *agent* of the baptism that Jesus brings (as water is the agent of John's baptism), then we see that what Jesus does in his ministry is to baptize men and women with the Holy Spirit - to plunge them into God's purifying and creative power - bringing them cleansing and forgiveness, renewal and life. Those who respond to Jesus' message find salvation. For those who refuse to repent, however, this baptism inevitably brings judgment and punishment, since for those who resist the Holy Spirit there can be no forgiveness (3.29). It would seem, then, that Mark understands his Gospel to be the story of how Jesus "baptized" men and women with the Holy Spirit.<sup>395</sup>

In light of this, Hooker argues that Mark understood John's water-baptism to be "a dramatic action by John symbolizing *another baptism*. Like all such prophetic actions, it was *a way of proclaiming what God was doing or was about to do*, a prophetic sign of the baptism with the Holy Spirit carried out by Jesus."<sup>396</sup>

A number of other scholars take a similar view. Robert Gundry, for example, suggests that for Mark, "Jesus' baptizing people in Holy Spirit represents the way Jesus will deal with the masses of repentant people whom John has baptized with water. Having himself received the Spirit, Jesus will teach them with authority, heal their sick, and ... cast unclean spirits out of their demon-possessed (cf. Acts 10.38)."<sup>397</sup> Noting that John did not give water to the people but

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<sup>395</sup>Hooker, "John's Baptism," 29–30. Hooker notes that she is picking up a thesis argued 40 years ago by J.E. Yates but which has been mostly ignored or rejected since that time. See J.E. Yates, *The Spirit and the Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 1963).

<sup>396</sup>Hooker, "John's Baptism," 30.

<sup>397</sup>Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 38.

rather used water to baptize, Gundry argues that in Mark “the stronger one will not be a Spirit-giver but a Spirit-user when he baptizes people.... Thus John’s prediction of the stronger one’s baptizing people in Holy Spirit will have its fulfillment recorded in this gospel.”<sup>398</sup> Arguing that the Spirit is not equivalent to fire, fire referring to judgment and the Spirit to gathering, Gundry suggests that we should think of a twofold baptism where the coming one “will use the Holy Spirit to deal salvifically with the repentant, and fire to deal judgmentally with the unrepentant.”<sup>399</sup>

While Hooker and others suggests that Luke’s account of the day of Pentecost misleads us “by identifying the enabling of a small company of disciples” with baptism with the Holy Spirit, others suggest that Luke’s account of the life of the early Church sheds light on the meaning of Mark 1.8. Commenting on Mark 1.8, France suggest that the event of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2 brings the reception of the Spirit into focus, though he adds that “it was the whole experience of the early Christian movement, not simply in the events of that one day, that the new relationship with God predicted by John as his successor’s gift would be experienced.”<sup>400</sup> The important thing for our present discussion however, is that, like Hooker, France does not see the fulfillment of John’s words in Christian water-baptism.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>398</sup>Gundry, *Mark*, 39.

<sup>399</sup>Gundry, *Mark*, 46. Adela Yarbro Collins similarly suggests that the gift of the Spirit in Mark is located within the activity of Jesus. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermenia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 146. Alistair Campbell offers an interesting alternative understanding, suggesting that baptism in Spirit and fire refers to suffering and death (fire) and resurrection (Spirit), and distinguishing the proleptic experience of the baptism of the Spirit by Jesus at the Jordan and by the church at Pentecost from the experience of the experience of it in its fullness in the resurrection of Jesus on Easter, and in the coming resurrection of the church. See R. Alastair Campbell, “Jesus and His Baptism,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 2 (1996): 191–214.

<sup>400</sup>R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 72–73.

<sup>401</sup>A third approach is represented by Donahue and Harrington who note that John’s prophecy directs the reader beyond Mark’s narrative, John’s baptism being “preparation for the more profound renewal of the people that will take place through ‘the stronger one’,” without further comment about whether this more profound renewal was connected with water-baptism or not. John Donahue and Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 64.

This discussion admittedly represents a relatively small sampling of the vast amount of scholarship of Mark's Gospel, but the arguments considered support rather than undermine the previous conclusion that the language of baptism with respect to the Spirit in Mark 1.8 is metaphorical, and has no necessary connection with Christian water-baptism. While I have found scholars who understand Mark 1.8 in terms of Christian water baptism, I have seen no evidence that conclusively points in this direction.<sup>402</sup>

Turning to Matthew's Gospel, we also find New Testament scholars who understand the coming baptism with Spirit and fire in terms of the mission of Jesus as related by Matthew. For example, Warren Carter understands the coming baptism with Spirit and fire to refer to the judgment and salvation that come with Jesus' mission: "This double meaning of blessing and destruction represented by each term would suggest that John presents Jesus' entire mission (including his role in the final judgment, 25.31 as one that has a double effect: some are blessed and purified (so 1.21 'save his people from their sins') some are punished and destroyed."<sup>403</sup> Similarly, Donald Senior suggests that the coming baptism with Spirit and fire is "a metaphor for the entire mission of Jesus, and not just the baptizing ritual itself."<sup>404</sup>

Others place more emphasis on Jesus as a figure of eschatological judgment in Matthew. For example, Daniel Harrington argues that the focus of Matthew's account of John's prediction is "not so much to the Christian sacrament of baptism as it is to the eschatological significance of Jesus who will come as judge for all the nations (see Matt 25.31-46)."<sup>405</sup> Davies and Allison

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<sup>402</sup>For an example of a New Testament scholar who views John's proclamation in 1.8 as being fulfilled in Christian water-baptism, see Marcus, *Mark 1-8*. Marcus notes that Jesus was imbued with strength and received the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and suggests that "this would suggest that Christians, too, are 'baptized in the Holy Spirit' at their own water baptisms (cf. Acts 2.38; 1 Cor 6.11; 12.13; Titus 3.5)." Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 158. See George R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 275-79. It is interesting that Marcus refers to Acts 2.38 here, rather than Acts 1.5, 8 and the account of Pentecost in Acts 2. We will see below that these texts point away from understanding Spirit-baptism in conjunction with water-baptism.

<sup>403</sup>Warren Carter, *Matthew at the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 100.

<sup>404</sup>Donald Senior, *Matthew*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 55.

<sup>405</sup>Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 59.

articulate a similar perspective. Drawing on Dunn's discussion of the Old Testament background of the language found in Matthew 3.11, they argue that in Matthew's gospel "fire and Spirit were not two things but one - 'fiery breath' (hediadys). He proclaimed that, at the boundary of the new age, all would pass through the fiery *rûah* of God, a stream which would purify the righteous and destroy the unrighteous."<sup>406</sup> Noting that fire is consistently an eschatological element in Matthew, Davies and Allison argue that the baptism of spirit and fire is best understood as referring to the eschatological tribulation that both Jesus and his disciples will have to undergo.<sup>407</sup> John Nolland's comments on Matthew 3.11 further underline Dunn's argument concerning the metaphorical use of the language of baptism: "The medium of John's baptizing activity is only water, but what is coming involves baptizing by means of the Holy Spirit and fire. Despite frequent claims to the contrary, no connection with Christian water baptism is at all evident. It is for the sake of the parallel with John's activity that this fresh activity is spoken of as baptizing: the formal parallelism underlines the material contrast."<sup>408</sup>

Again, this sampling of the vast amount of scholarship on Matthew's Gospel has revealed understandings of Matthew's account of John the Baptist's words which support rather than

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<sup>406</sup>Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 317. Davies and Allison refer to James D. G. Dunn, "Spirit-and-Fire Baptism" and D. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia, 1985), 124–25. Davies and Allison note that others argue that Matthew understood John's prediction to refer to two baptisms, the baptism of the Spirit referring to Christian baptism, and baptism of fire being eschatological, and acknowledge that this possibility cannot be excluded, referring specifically to U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, 1. Teilband: Mt 1–7*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament (Zürich, 1985), 149. [English translation, Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 169–70]. Hagner's perspective on this issue is interesting in that, while he understands the coming to baptism with the Holy Spirit in metaphorical terms, following Dunn, he also suggests that the fulfillment of it is in Christian baptism, which is "no longer a baptism of preparation, as was John's, but rather an extension of that baptism 'in the Holy Spirit,' which John had prophesied." Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 53.

<sup>407</sup>Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 318. See D. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 124–28.

<sup>408</sup>Nolland, *Matthew*, 146. In an earlier essay on the role of baptism in Matthew's Gospel, Nolland reinforces this view in his comment on Matthew's account of the baptism of Jesus: "Matthew makes it quite clear that the opening of heaven, the descent of the Spirit and the heavenly voice, while they follow on from the baptism, are clearly distinguished from the baptism itself; from baptism at the hands of John, Jesus moves on immediately to an appointment with God himself. I conclude that there is no specific link between Jesus' baptism and Christian baptism as a baptism to be distinguished from John's baptism." Nolland, "In Such a Manner", 76.

undermine the previous conclusion that the language of baptism with respect to the Spirit in Matthew 3.11 is metaphorical. While the possibility that Matthew understood John's promise of a coming baptism with the Spirit to be fulfilled in Christian water-baptism can not be excluded, as Davies and Allison note, this discussion has revealed a number of other plausible arguments concerning Spirit-baptism in Matthew.

It is Luke that provides the most to work with in understanding how the early Church understood John's words concerning the coming baptism with Spirit (and fire) through the accounts in Acts. In Acts 1 Jesus promises the immanent fulfillment of John's words through the coming of the Spirit upon the disciples (the fulfillment being narrated in Acts 2), and in Acts 11.16 the descent of the Spirit upon Gentiles is identified as the fulfillment of John's words concerning the baptism with the Spirit. The distinction of this baptism in the Spirit from baptism with water is supported by these accounts because, as Nolland points out, neither of these events take place in connection with water baptism.<sup>409</sup>

While the "tongues of fire" that appear on Pentecost may be intended to be understood as a fulfillment of John's words that the coming baptism would be "with the Holy Spirit and fire," Nolland notes that there is no direct claim that John's words concerning fire baptism were fulfilled.<sup>410</sup> Jesus' words in Luke 12.49 about bringing fire upon the earth and about his coming baptism point towards an understanding of fire baptism in terms of refinement which "occurs through painful and costly decisions made and stands taken (14.26-33; 12.8-12), even as "a final

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<sup>409</sup>Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 152. Nolland follows Dunn and Fitzmyer in his understanding of John's baptism and ministry, but explains that "the fulfillment is not necessarily as the expectation. Baptism with the Spirit is claimed for the Pentecostal event and its repetitions (Acts 1.5; 11.16). The Pentecostal Spirit for the most part confers a certain intimacy of relationship with God (Acts 2; 10.46 etc) and strengthens for a resolute stand and witness for Christ (Acts 1.8; 4.31; Luke 12.12; 24.48-49). However, the Holy Spirit is also witness (Acts 5.32), and Luke will understand this in terms of the tangible presence of the power of God in the church and the individual Christian (Acts 2.6-12 [cf v.33], 43 [cf v 47]; 4.13, 16 etc)." Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 153. Similarly, Fitzmyer notes that, in distinction from John the Baptist's expectation, Luke had "his own understanding of the Spirit poured out by the Risen Christ (Acts 2.33b-c) and of fire related to that Spirit. Obviously, in this way the Spirit of Pentecost would be understood to accomplish the refinement and purification in its own fuller way." Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 474.

<sup>410</sup>Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 153.

eschatological climax is reserved (17.29 and cf. 18.8); 21.25-26, 36).<sup>411</sup> Green acknowledges that Jesus' words in Luke 12.49, together with the use of fire imagery to indicate judgment elsewhere, could point towards an understanding of baptism with fire as a distinct event from baptism with Spirit, but he also suggests that Luke's understanding of the event of Pentecost and the mission of the early church as the actualization of John's promise of the Spirit "encourages a reading of the phrases in Acts as elliptical - that is, as the reduction of the definition of Jesus' baptism ('with the Holy Spirit and fire') to the first term ('with the Holy Spirit') for the purpose of emphasis."<sup>412</sup>

### 3.4 Baptism with the Spirit in Acts

The discussion of Luke's Gospel brings us to the second exegetical locus for this chapter, this being the accounts of baptism in the book of Acts. One of the exegetical moves that Barth makes in his discussion of baptism with the Spirit is to connect the words of John the Baptist with the account of Pentecost narrated in Acts 2, explaining that "baptism with the Spirit is concretely the divine cleansing and reorientation of men, in which, as in Ac. 2, and in analogy to what happened to the prophet according to Is. 6.7, they are appointed public witnesses of Jesus and are authorized and equipped as such."<sup>413</sup> Barth's point is clearly illustrated in the Isaiah 6 passage:

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<sup>411</sup>Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 153. Similarly, Dunn suggests that in Luke 12.49-50 we see "Jesus taking up the Baptist's distinctive metaphor and transforming it by treating it as a prescription of his *own* destiny." James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 808. Here Dunn takes up his earlier suggestion in James D. G. Dunn, "Birth of a Metaphor". See also Dunn's discussion in James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 803-04. Similarly, Davies and Allison suggest that "Jesus interprets his own time as part and parcel of the eschatological tribulation; and he and his disciples will have to undergo the baptism of fire of which John spoke." Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, III.317. See also D. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 124-28. Nolland suggests that the story of Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5.1-11 points to a more direct fulfillment of the purgative aspect of John's expectation. Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 153, 155. Campbell takes up elements of the interpretation of Dunn and others, but argues that Jesus' baptism by fire in his death together with his baptism by the Spirit in his resurrection are the full inauguration of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom which will "be consummated at his Second Coming when Jesus will baptise the world in Spirit and in fire." R. Alastair Campbell, "Jesus and His Baptism," 209.

<sup>412</sup>Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 181-82. On this form of ellipsis, see Bernard Dupriez, *A Dictionary of Literary Devices* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 151-52.

<sup>413</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 30. It should be noted that Barth makes no distinction here between soteriological and vocational functions of baptism with the Holy Spirit, understanding the one event to encompass both. In contrast to Holiness and Pentecostal

baptism with the Spirit cleanses and equips the Christian for witness in analogy with the burning coal cleansing the lips of the prophet of Isaiah in order that he might be sent as a messenger to Israel.

Making such a connection between the Baptist's words concerning the coming baptism with the Spirit and the event of Pentecost appears to be in accord with the narrative of Luke-Acts, where Jesus promise concerning the coming baptism in the Spirit in Acts 1.5 echoes John's words, and is immediately followed by the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. As mentioned above, it should be noted that there is no water involved in this account of the first baptism with the Spirit.

The connection between Spirit baptism and Pentecost as an event distinct from water-baptism is further reinforced by the second Acts text to which Barth refers, Acts 11.16. In this text, the only other time an event is described as a baptism with the Spirit in Acts, Peter explains the Spirit falling upon Gentiles as a baptism with the Spirit like that which happened at Pentecost. And, as at Pentecost, there is no suggestion that water-baptism took place at that time. Instead, Spirit-baptism is connected with belief (Acts 11.17) and with repentance (Acts 11.18). While both belief and repentance could have been expressed through water baptism, the narrative of the event in question makes it clear that water-baptism occurred as a response to the descent of the

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traditions which distinguish between the soteriological work of the Spirit in a person becoming a Christian and the vocational work of the Spirit, which is a secondary experience of the Spirit which empowers and equips a Christian for a specific ministry, Barth argues that baptism with the Holy Spirit encompasses both at once. He acknowledges that in some passages of Scripture, such as the account of Pentecost, the Spirit's work is associated with appointing and equipping for witness, while other passages connect receiving the Spirit with repentance and forgiveness. However, Barth contends that baptism with the Holy Spirit refers to a new determination of the one baptized by God through the work of the Spirit which is the "divine preparation of man for the Christian life in its totality," although it has explicit concrete reference to the witness of the community and individuals in many cases, but in others only implicitly, having explicit concrete reference to repentance and forgiveness in these case. For a discussion of the debate between Dunn (who emphasizes the soteriological work of the Spirit) and Pentecostal scholars (who emphasize the vocational work of the Spirit), see Max B. Turner, "The Spirit and Salvation in Luke-Acts," in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. Graham N. Stanton, Bruce W. Longenecker, and Stephen C. Barton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 103–16. Campbell supports Turner and Menzies, arguing that "Pentecost parallels the Jordan, not as a work of regeneration or Christian initiation... but as a commissioning or equipping for prophetic ministry." R. Alastair Campbell, "Jesus and His Baptism," 210. For Campbell, both Jordan and Pentecost are a baptism in the Holy Spirit "only in a proleptic sense. They are not the coming of the Kingdom. They are a foretaste of the kingdom. Both look forward to the fullness of the Spirit, which is resurrection, for Jesus and for us." R. Alastair Campbell, "Jesus and His Baptism," 213.

Spirit, rather than in conjunction with it (Acts 10.44-48). Dunn observes that Luke's account of this event, together with his account of Pentecost, make clear that John's distinction "between water-rite and Spirit bestowal carries over into the Christian era,"<sup>414</sup> noting that "it is particularly noticeable that the only two receptions of the Spirit specifically designated baptisms in Spirit (Pentecost and Caesarea) are the ones most clearly separated from and independent of Christian water-baptism (or any rite)."<sup>415</sup>

The account of Pentecost in Acts 2 plays an important role in John Colwell's criticism of Barth's doctrine of baptism. In Acts 2 Peter appeals to Joel 2.28-32 to explain the effects of the coming of the Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost, announcing to the believing crowd: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2.38-39). Having argued that a sacrament must be "constituted as such through a specific promise of God," Colwell notes that in Acts 2 Peter links the baptism with the reception of the Spirit as the fulfillment of the promise of Joel for an eschatological outpouring of the Spirit:

Those baptized on the day of Pentecost do so as a sign of repentance and with the hope of forgiveness but also with the expectation of the imminent fulfillment of this promise of the outpouring of the Spirit. And it is through the means of baptism that this promise is effected. As distinct from John's baptism, the

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<sup>414</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit Volume 2: Pneumatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 48.

<sup>415</sup>James D. G. Dunn, "Spirit-and-Fire Baptism," 96. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 400. C.F.D. Moule also notes that in Acts Spirit-baptism seems to be contrasted with water-baptism (Acts 1.5 and 11.16, while 8.16 has a gap between the two). C.F.D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit* (London: Mowbray, 1978), 77. Hartmann also notes that baptism and the Spirit are combined only indirectly in Acts. Lars Hartman, *'Into the Name of the Lord Jesus': Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 26 n.60. Ferguson maintains that the pattern in Acts is water and then Spirit, and that the "Gentile Pentecost" departs from this pattern in order to justify giving of baptism to Gentiles without first requiring them to be circumcised. Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 177-78.



significance of Christian baptism in water is a baptism with and by the Spirit.<sup>416</sup>

While Colwell is right to note that Peter's words suggest that the reception of the Spirit will follow rather than precede baptism,<sup>417</sup> he fails to establish that the promise of the Spirit is fulfilled "through the means of baptism." The event of the outpouring of the Spirit which Peter refers to the promise from Joel to explain in Acts 2 takes place without any connection to baptism. And while Peter announces that a similar reception of the Spirit will follow baptism, he does not say that it will take place by means of or in conjunction with baptism. As Dunn points out, Acts 2.28 refers to three acts performed by three agents: "Repent" is an active imperative indicating what those who desire to respond to Peter's message must do; "be baptized" is a passive imperative indicating what must be done to them by the community; and "receive the Holy Spirit" is a future active indicative giving an unqualified promise of what God will do.<sup>418</sup> Even if this text is understood as setting up a normative pattern for the process of conversion-

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<sup>416</sup>John E. Colwell, *Promise & Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Paternoster, 2005), 111–12. For Colwell's understanding of sacrament as promise, see also Colwell, *Promise & Presence*, 61. While Colwell's *Promise and Presence* is focused on his constructive proposal, it includes significant critique of Barth's doctrine of baptism. Colwell argues that the root of Barth's rejection of sacrament is a problematic doctrine of the Trinity. Drawing on the work of Colin Gunton, Colwell argues that trinitarian relations are properly understood in terms of mediated relatedness, and that Barth's doctrine of baptism arises from his tendency to depersonalize the Spirit, to subsume the work of the Spirit into that of the Son, and "to affirm the unmediated immediate rather than the mediated immediate." Colwell, *Promise & Presence*, 40. See Colwell, *Promise & Presence*, 31–41. See also Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity*, The Bampton Lectures 1992 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 191; Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 162ff; Colin Gunton, "Salvation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 143–58.

<sup>417</sup>Colwell, *Promise & Presence*, 119–20.

<sup>418</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 91. Fergusson suggests that the tension between the connection between baptism and the Spirit in Acts 2.38 and the experiences of the Spirit at Pentecost and in Acts 10 apart from baptism can be resolved by differentiating between "baptism with the Holy Spirit" (Pentecost and Acts 10) and the "gift of the Holy Spirit" promised in Acts 2.38. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 169. It does not seem plausible, however, that if, as Fergusson suggests, the event of Pentecost was the supplementation of the apostles' earlier baptism by John in fulfillment of the promise of the Spirit, that the promise of the Spirit in connection with baptism in 2.38 would be a different experience of the Spirit. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 170.

initiation,<sup>419</sup> it is entirely possible to see the reception of the Spirit as a distinct act that follows from the act of water-baptism rather than as somehow integrated into the event of water-baptism.

A further difficulty with understanding Acts 2.38 as a normative pattern (repentance - water-baptism - reception of the Spirit) is that few of Luke's subsequent narratives follow the pattern.<sup>420</sup> For example, the next time baptism appears in Acts is in the chapter 8 account of the ministry of Philip in Samaria. In this narrative the Samaritans who responded to Philip receive the Spirit, not with their water-baptism, but in connection with the laying on of the hands of Peter and John some time later. There have been various suggestions regarding the reason for this delay, but for our purpose it is enough to note that reception of the Spirit is clearly distinguished from water-baptism here.<sup>421</sup> The narrative of Acts 8 clearly supports the contention that Spirit-

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<sup>419</sup>The term "conversion-initiation" was coined by James Dunn in his *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, to describe the process of becoming a Christian. Dunn suggested that this process includes baptism in or gift of the Spirit "together with the effective proclamation of the Gospel, belief in (*εἰς*) Jesus as Lord, and water-baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus." James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 4. Dunn's term has been widely taken up, replacing George Beasley-Murray's earlier term of "conversion-baptism." Cross, "Spirit- and Water-Baptism," 126–27.

<sup>420</sup>Joel Green notes that it is common to take Acts 2.38 as setting a normative pattern for baptism, referring to Max Turner's *Power from on High* as representative of this treatment, but notes that accounts such as Acts 8.4-25 and 19.1-7 do not fit the pattern. Green, "From 'John's Baptism'," 157–58. See Max B. Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts*, Journal for Pentecostal Theology: Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 397–98.

<sup>421</sup>Dunn notes that this extended interval between water baptism and Spirit baptism is a departure from the pattern of Acts 2.38. Acknowledging that there is no textual support for his earlier suggestion that the interval was a result of the defective faith of the Samaritans, he observes that the text remains a puzzle. Dunn suggests that it is clear that Luke saw the Spirit as crucial for entry into the community, and that the concern of the text may reflect the need for ecclesial control over a splinter group, but that there is no certainty on this. James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 283. Green suggests that this departure from the Acts 2.38 norm can be justified "on narrational grounds," revealing how God had to go to extraordinary lengths to help Jesus' followers realize the aim of inclusion of Gentiles. Green, "From 'John's Baptism'," 166–67. See also Hartman, 'Into the Name of the Lord Jesus', 134–35. Stanley Fowler addresses the discrepancy between the ordering of Acts 2.38 and the narratives in Acts by asserting normativity of Acts 2 over the historically conditioned events portrayed in the narratives of Acts: "In the end it seems clear that if there is a normative understanding of the relation between baptism and the Spirit in Acts, then it is to be found, not in narrative accounts of what *did* happen in diverse experiences, but in statements declaring what is *expected* to occur." Fowler, *More Than a Symbol*, 160. In support of this Fowler refers to Richard Longenecker's judgment that "we should understand Peter's preaching at Pentecost as theologically normative for the relation in Acts between conversion, water baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit," and understand events which do not fit this pattern as "more historically conditioned and

baptism does not come through water-baptism, nor are they two sides of one coin, one event.<sup>422</sup> The connection between reception of the Spirit with laying on of hands rather than water-baptism is also made in the third text to which Barth refers in his excursus, Acts 19.2f.

In Acts 19, Paul encounters a group of disciples who had been baptized with water “into John’s baptism” without any awareness of the Spirit. Upon hearing this, Paul instructs them and baptizes them “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Subsequent to this they receive the Holy Spirit, but in connection with Paul laying his hands on them rather than through baptism. Whether or not one agrees with Barth’s rendering of the text, whereby he reinforces his contention that John’s baptism was already a baptism into the name of Christ, the text clearly portrays reception of the Spirit as a separate occurrence subsequent to water-baptism.<sup>423</sup> Furthermore, as Dunn points out, for Paul the crucial question to be asked of these “disciples” is not whether or not they have been baptized, but whether they received the Spirit when they believed: “For Luke once more it is the coming of the Spirit which is the central and most crucial factor in conversion-initiation and in Christian identity.”<sup>424</sup>

To sum up, Dunn’s term “conversion-initiation” has widely replaced earlier language of “conversion-baptism” to describe becoming a Christian as involving a process which includes

circumstantially understood.” Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 285.

<sup>422</sup>See Ben Witherington III, *Troubled Waters: The Real New Testament Theology of Baptism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 66. Ben Witherington comments that this text clearly distinguishes baptism as initiation from conversion and reception of the Spirit: in baptizing them, Philip “was simply initiating them into the new covenant community. They did not receive the Spirit by this ritual. The two baptisms can and should be distinguished. One is a boundary marker; the other actually enacts what the rite only depicts. Witherington III, *Troubled Waters*, 90. See also Witherington III, *Troubled Waters*, 72, 77.

<sup>423</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 62. For a critique of Barth’s rendering of this text, see Barrett, *Acts*, 897. Erikson briefly outlines the views of Käsemann, Marshall and others concerning this passage, noting that Luke’s aims in narrating this episode are generally thought to “revolve around the theme of restoring or maintaining unity and orthodoxy.” Richard J. Erickson, “The Jailing of John and the Baptism of Jesus: Luke 3:19–21,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 4 (December 1993): 464. See Käsemann, “Disciples,” 144–45; I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1988), 213.

<sup>424</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 758.

proclamation, belief, reception of the Spirit, and water-baptism. It seems clear that the ordering of these elements, and in particular the relationship between the reception of the Spirit to the other elements, is variable. As Marshall has observed, “it is clear that Luke had received several varying accounts of how the Spirit was received by men, but he has not tried to harmonize them and impose a pattern upon them ... If Luke was wishing to fit the work of the Spirit into a pattern, he had no need to record these anomalous experiences.”<sup>425</sup> The narratives of Acts indicate that the different elements must be present to complete the process of conversion-initiation, but do not show that they need not be in a particular order, nor do they necessarily occur on a single occasion or as a single event. As a result, it seems entirely reasonable to see them as actions by different agents that work together in the process of becoming Christian - actions of candidate, community, and God. Dunn sums up the evidence from Acts well: “The various accounts provided by Luke, including Acts 8.14-17 and 10.44-48, can hardly be taken to indicate Luke’s belief that baptism bestowed the Spirit.”<sup>426</sup> As noted earlier, John Yocum faults Barth for paying insufficient attention to the narratives of Acts “which on the whole suggest an identification of baptism with water and baptism in the Spirit.”<sup>427</sup> However, contrary to what Yocum would lead us to believe, an examination of the narratives of baptism in Acts lends further support to Barth’s view that baptism with the Spirit is a distinct event from baptism with water.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>425</sup>Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 198–99.

<sup>426</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 761 n.65. Commenting on the account of Acts 19, Dunn notes that it is “simply an inaccurate rendering of Luke’s account (as of Luke 3.21-22) for Fitzmyer to say that ‘the episode emphasizes Christian baptism as a baptism in the Spirit’ or for Jervell to say, ‘The difference between John’s baptism and Jesus’s baptism lies in the bestowal of the Spirit.’” See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation and Commentary* (1998), 642; J Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 475. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 90–102. Similarly, it is Hartman’s judgment that both the accounts of Jesus’ baptism and subsequent endowment with the Spirit and the accounts of baptism in Acts connect water baptism and the gift of the Spirit only in an indirect manner. Hartman, *Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*, 26. Together with Acts 8.17, Acts 19 contributes to the case that if the narratives in Acts point to a conjunction of God’s act of sending the Holy Spirit with a human action, the laying on of hands is a stronger candidate than is baptism.

<sup>427</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 164.

<sup>428</sup>While it is possible for John and his hearers to have understood the language of Spirit-baptism in one way, but for post-Pentecost reflection to have given it new meaning, an examination of the texts relating to baptism in Acts gives no grounds for

### 3.5 Baptism with the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12.13

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit

Returning to Barth's excursus, we now turn to the only Pauline text to which he refers, 1 Cor 12.13. As with Mark 1.8 and parallels, Dunn invites us to attend to the metaphorical use of the language of baptism in this text. Commenting on his translation of this text ("in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... and were all watered with the one Spirit"), Dunn finds echoes of traditional metaphorical language connecting Spirit and water, as is found in such texts as Isa 32.15; 44.4; Ezek 39.29; Joel 2.28.<sup>429</sup> He notes, however, that the history of the interpretation of this text treats the language of baptism as a technical term, without serious consideration of its metaphorical uses: "As with other Pauline texts, so with 1 Cor. 12.13, we find the same unwillingness to recognize metaphor when it is clearly present, and the same assumption that such a metaphor can only be explicated by a lively sacramental theology."<sup>430</sup>

Dunn's argument is that in 1 Cor 12.13 Paul refers his readers to their shared experience of the same Spirit as the basis of their corporate life together. It is because of the one Spirit that they are one body, not because of one baptism:

This is as we might expect from Paul's references to the Spirit  
elsewhere in his letters - the experience of the Spirit given them as

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asserting that the post-Pentecost Christian community had begun to see Spirit-baptism as occurring in conjunction with water-baptism.

<sup>429</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 418.

<sup>430</sup>James D. G. Dunn, "'Baptized' as Metaphor," 309. Colwell appeals to the judgment of N. T. Wright in discounting the possibility that the language of baptism could have continued to be used to refer to anything besides the ritual: "Some years ago I recall Tom Wright commenting that where the New Testament mentions baptism we should assume that it is to baptism that it is referring. On this simple (though strangely contested) basis, then, I assume that when Paul states that '...we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body...' (1 Corinthians 12.13) he is referring to a baptism of the Spirit mediated through a baptism in water." Colwell, *Promise & Presence*, 112 n.12.

the decisive factor marking the beginning of their lives as Christians (e.g. Rom. 8.9; Gal. 3.2-5). In this context it would be most natural for Paul to intend his readers to hear his talk of “baptized in Spirit” as a reminder of that experience under the appropriate water imagery of being “baptized in.” The indication of the element in which they were baptized as the Spirit (“in Spirit”), would simply reinforce the metaphorical status of the language, echoing as it does the explicit contrast of the Baptist between “baptize in water” and “baptize in Spirit” that characterized his original coining of the metaphor.<sup>431</sup>

Drawing an analogy between baptism and circumcision, Dunn argues that the fact that the language of baptism would also bring to mind their baptism in water no more implies that Paul is here talking about their water-baptism than Paul’s speaking of being circumcised in heart, which would surely bring literal circumcision to their minds, would be understood to refer to literal circumcision. To the contrary, noting Paul’s polemic against circumcision, Dunn argues that Paul’s

point was precisely that they had already received the reality metaphored in talk of the circumcision of the heart, *without and independent of the rite of circumcision*. The Spirit in the heart had already given the reality that the rite only looked forward to (Rom. 2.25-29). Circumcision as a metaphor had been effective and realized even when circumcision as a rite had been ineffective and abandoned (Phil. 3.3).<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>431</sup>James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 309. See James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 419–34.

<sup>432</sup>James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 301–02. Dunn further argues that the derivation of the metaphorical usage does not necessarily continue to be associated with the literal rite through the example of circumcision. He notes that there is no sense in the Old Testament that circumcision of the heart (Deut 10.16, Jer 4.4; 9.25-26; Ezek 44.9) is in any way directly related to the performance of the rite of physical circumcision: “There is not the slightest suggestion that the use and legitimacy of such a metaphor [as circumcision of the heart] was somehow integrated into the actual performance of the rite: the metaphor had been

Dunn's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12.13 has recently been questioned by Anthony Cross. While Cross grants that the language of baptism can be used metaphorically and does not necessarily mean water-baptism,<sup>433</sup> he argues that a figurative use of baptism does not exclude secondary reference to water-baptism.<sup>434</sup> In particular, while he concedes that in the case of 1 Cor. 12.13 Fee and Dunn are right in noting that the emphasis is on the Spirit, Cross suggests that this does not "preclude a secondary reference, particularly if it is to something closely associated with the primary one both theologically and temporally, as Spirit- and water-baptism are in conversion initiation."<sup>435</sup>

Appealing to the growing consensus that conversion in the New Testament is to be understood in terms of a process of conversion-initiation, Cross argues that the language of Spirit-baptism in 1

drawn from the rite, of course, the reality of a life transformed from within as the reality that the covenant people (the circumcised) should realize; but no sense is evident of circumcision as a 'sacrament' in the later terms of Christian theology." James D. G. Dunn, "'Baptized' as Metaphor," 301. Drawing on circumcision as an example, Dunn argues that "as the rite of circumcision looked for a reality of transformed life that could be expressed by using the same image in metaphor (the circumcision of the heart), so John used his distinctive action ('the baptizer') as a metaphor for what he predicted the Coming One would do." James D. G. Dunn, "'Baptized' as Metaphor," 304. On circumcision and baptism, see references listed in James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 157 n.18.

<sup>433</sup>Cross, "Spirit- and Water-Baptism," 127. Cross refers to Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), e.g. 176, 180, 845; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 604–06. Richard Hays similarly understands 1 Cor 12.13 to refer to be using metaphorical language to refer to the reception of the Spirit: "The Spirit is not the agent who does the baptizing, but the figurative element into which the new converts were immersed, being plunged into a new world of Spirit-experience. The two clauses of verse 13 are equally metaphorical, and both refer to this same experience. 'Drinking the Spirit' ... has nothing to do with the Eucharist: it is simply a vivid expression for Paul's conviction that the one Spirit has been given in overflowing abundance to everyone in the community (cf. John 7.37-39). Similarly, the use of the metaphor of being 'baptized in the Holy Spirit' elsewhere in early Christian tradition (Matt. 3.11; Mark 1.8; Luke 3.16; John 1.33; Acts 1.5) suggests that it should be distinguished from water baptism rather than simply identified with it." Richard Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 214. Ben Witherington also suggests that the reference here is probably to conversion rather than water-baptism. Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 258.

<sup>434</sup>Cross, "Spirit- and Water-Baptism," 131.

<sup>435</sup>Cross, "Spirit- and Water-Baptism," 134.

Cor. 12.13 is a synecdoche for the process of conversion initiation, and therefore has a secondary reference to water-baptism.<sup>436</sup> He argues further that “the fact that the origin of the metaphor of Spirit-baptism was the rite of water-baptism, and that these two baptisms ‘regularly’ coincide only heightens the probability” that an association between Spirit-baptism and water-baptism was made.<sup>437</sup>

However, it is the claim that water-baptism and Spirit-baptism regularly coincide that is at issue here. Cross’s point is reinforced by his observation that, in view of Acts 2.38, “the New Testament includes *at least* one passage which links” water-baptism and Spirit-baptism closely, but this is hardly evidence that the two *regularly* coincide.<sup>438</sup> Cross himself argues that the variation in the ordering of the various elements of conversion-initiation in the narratives of Acts calls into question the taking of any one of these narratives as presenting a normative pattern for the process of conversion-initiation.<sup>439</sup> And as we have seen in our discussion above, it is clearly not the case that Spirit-baptism and water baptism regularly coincide in these narratives.

Cross’s locating Spirit- and water-baptism within the process of conversion-initiation is crucial to his argument. However, the simple fact that language of Spirit-baptism would bring the rite of water-baptism to mind itself says nothing about the relationship that might exist between the two. Such a resonance would have been triggered even if the relationship between water-baptism and Spirit-baptism was a relationship of similar to that of literal circumcision to circumcision of the heart as Dunn has noted: While Paul’s language of circumcision of heart surely brings to mind

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<sup>436</sup>Cross, “Spirit- and Water-Baptism,” 130, 136–37. Cross explains that, while metaphor no longer carries the meaning of the literal referent, as Dunn has emphasized, synecdoche involves “using a word to stand for the *whole* of which the literal referent is only a part, or a *part* of which the literal referent is the whole.” Stephen Wright, “The Voice of Jesus,” 7, 193–207. As a synecdoche, language of Spirit-baptism would call to mind the whole process of conversion-initiation, and in particular water-baptism.

<sup>437</sup>Cross, “Spirit- and Water-Baptism,” 128. See Hartman, *‘Into the Name of the Lord Jesus’*, 55 n.7; Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries*, second, revised (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 42.

<sup>438</sup>Cross, “Spirit- and Water-Baptism,” 130.

<sup>439</sup>Cross, “Spirit- and Water-Baptism,” 132.



the experience of physical circumcision, it was certainly not a synecdoche for a larger whole that included both physical and spiritual circumcision.

Probably the strongest element of Cross's argument is his appeal to Ephesians 4: "I wish to argue that recognition that Spirit- and water-baptism are essential components of conversion-initiation means that it is a false dichotomy to separate the two, otherwise the writer of Eph. 4.5 would have had to have said there are 'two baptisms'."<sup>440</sup> On the other hand, it could be argued that while Paul could use the language of Spirit-baptism to describe the coming of the Spirit into a person's life, this was one of various metaphors for this event. As a result, when speaking of baptism without qualification, it makes sense to think of the literal rite of water-baptism in the same way that if one spoke of circumcision, one would be referring to the literal rite of circumcision unless there was reason to believe that circumcision was being used in a metaphorical way. As Dunn has noted, John coined two uses for the language of baptism, one as a technical term and one as a metaphor for the bestowal of the Spirit. In the case of Ephesians 4.5, baptism is used without qualification and is likely being used as a technical term, rather than as a metaphor.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the question of the exegetical basis of Barth's understanding of baptism with the Spirit as an event that is distinct from baptism with water through three foci: 1) Mark 1.8 and parallels, 2) the narratives of Acts, and 3) 1 Corinthians 12.13. With respect to the first focus, Mark 1.8 and parallels, the New Testament scholars to which Yocum refers do not support his case unambiguously. Furthermore, Dunn makes a strong argument that the John the Baptist's language of baptizing in Spirit in Mark 1.8 and parallels represents a metaphorical use of the language of baptism. Dunn's argument reinforced by other New Testament scholars, including some focused on the historical John the Baptist, and some focused on how John is portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels. It should be acknowledged, however, that the paucity of evidence within the Synoptic accounts makes it difficult, perhaps impossible, to conclusively settle the question for Mark and Matthew. In the case of the Gospel of Luke the narratives of

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<sup>440</sup>Cross, "Spirit- and Water-Baptism," 133.

Acts provide further illumination. An examination of the narratives of Acts provided some of the most conclusive evidence for the view that baptism with the Spirit was understood to be distinct from water-baptism. The discussion of 1 Corinthians 12.13 returned to Dunn's argument that language of baptism with the Spirit is metaphorical.

This chapter demonstrates that strong exegetical arguments can be made for understanding baptism with the Spirit as an event that is distinct from baptism with water.<sup>441</sup> Which is not to say that the issue is settled. There is not a clear scholarly consensus on most of the texts considered, and there are New Testament scholars who continue to advocate readings of these texts which support traditional sacramental understandings of baptism.<sup>442</sup>

On the broader question of Barth's understanding of baptism with the Holy Spirit as the beginning of the Christian life, things are more complex. While the narratives of Acts present water-baptism and reception of the Spirit as two distinct elements of the process of becoming a Christian, Barth's strict ordering of Spirit-baptism as an event which is answered by human decision and action does not find the same support in the Acts narratives. While some receive the Spirit prior to their baptism, such as the Gentiles upon whom the Spirit fell while Peter was preaching to them (Acts 10.44; 11.15), others, such as the Samaritans in Acts 8, respond to the proclamation of the gospel and request baptism prior to receiving the Spirit. Furthermore, Peter's observation that the Spirit fell "when we believed" (Acts 11.17) stands in tension with Barth's

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<sup>441</sup>The discussion of the other major New Testament passages relating to baptism will be important for any final assessment, The argument presented here has shown that, at least on the basis of the texts considered thus far, Barth's move of distinguishing Spirit-baptism from water-baptism has a strong exegetical basis.

<sup>442</sup>And still others who agree that the Synoptics and Acts point to a distinction between water-baptism and Spirit-baptism while retaining a sacramental theology of baptism. Thus, Herbert Vorgrimmler suggests that the fact that the Synoptic authors supplemented "the scene of baptism with a revelation scene, according to which it is only after baptism that the divine Spirit descended on Jesus," indicates a "temporal (real or possible) disjunction of water baptism and Spirit-baptism." Herbert Vorgrimmler, *Sacramental Theology*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 103. Vorgrimmler notes that Acts similarly distinguishes the two baptisms. Vorgrimmler, *Sacramental Theology*, 104. Vorgrimmler draws upon the work of Raymond Schwager to provide the exegetical grounding of his view of baptism as "an ecclesial 'primal prayer' for Spirit-baptism that is certain to be heard, but God can also give the baptism in the Spirit to a person even in the absence of such a prayer." Vorgrimmler, *Sacramental Theology*, 107. See R. Schwager, "Wassertaufe, ein Gebet um die Geisttaufe?" *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 100 (1978): 60.

understanding of baptism with the Spirit as necessarily prior to belief. This is also the case with Acts 2.38 which speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit as something which will be given to those who respond and are baptized, rather than as something that must happen in order that a person can respond faithfully. On the basis of the argument presented in this chapter, then, if Barth's doctrine of baptism with the Holy Spirit is vulnerable to exegetical critique, it is so much more strongly at this point rather than on the basis of his distinguishing baptism with the Spirit from water-baptism.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>443</sup>For example, Dunn argues that the New Testament portrays reception of the Spirit as climax of the process of becoming a Christian, rather than its beginning. See, for example, James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 93, 96.

## 4 The basis for Christian Baptism

Whenever the church points to the Lamb of God and administers the covenant sign of water as the pledge of a new life, it celebrates anew the baptism of John. It is not stretching a point to say that to follow Christ at all is to be baptized by John.<sup>444</sup>

Barth's view that the basis for Christian baptism is the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist rather than the command of the risen Jesus as recorded in Matthew 28 significantly shapes his account of baptism. This issue represents another key aspect of the argument of the baptism fragment that has been strongly criticized. For example, John Webster argues that Barth's use of Jesus' baptism as a foundation for Christian baptism is not textually supported in the New Testament, observing that "the New Testament does not elsewhere refer back to Jesus' own baptism in its discussions of the beginning of the Christian life."<sup>445</sup> Webster does not find convincing Barth's suggestion that the rooting of baptism in the ministry of John and in Jesus' own baptism were simply taken-for-granted aspects of life in the primitive community.

Webster's criticism is weakened, however, by the fact that there is similarly no referring back to a baptismal command of the risen Jesus in New Testament discussions of the beginning of the Christian life. If the New Testament does not articulate the argument that Christians should be baptized because Jesus was baptized, neither does it articulate the argument that Christians

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<sup>444</sup>Zwingli, *Von der Taufe, von der Wiedertaufe und von der Kindertaufe*, in David Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Baptism of John," in *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 162. Steinmetz notes that in the arguments between the Reformers and the Anabaptists, it was the Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier who emphasized the distinction between John's baptism and Christian baptism, suggesting that Hubmaier's case for adult baptism might have been strengthened if he had not placed such an absolute contrast between John's baptism and Christian baptism. David Steinmetz, "The Baptism of John and the Baptism of Jesus in Huldrych Zwingli, Balthasar Hubmaier and Late Medieval Theology," in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 163. Calvin similarly linked Christian baptism to John's baptism: "This makes it perfectly certain that the ministry of John was the very same as that which was afterwards delegated to the apostles. For the different hands by which baptism is administered do not make it a different baptism, but sameness of doctrine proves it to be the same." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: A New Translation*, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1957), IV.xv.7.

<sup>445</sup> Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 168.

should be baptized because Jesus commanded it.<sup>446</sup> This chapter builds an exegetical case in support of Barth's view, arguing that Matthew 28 is more properly understood as a missional than a baptismal text, and drawing on contemporary discussions of the relationship between Jesus and John, and arguments that Jesus or his disciples likely carried on a baptismal ministry in continuity with that of John.<sup>447</sup>

## 4.1 Matthew 28.19 as a missional command

An important part of Barth's argument is his contention that Matthew 28.19 does not relate Jesus' institution of baptism, but that it is instead a missional text. Jesus is not so much instructing his disciples to baptize as he is defining *who* it is that they are to baptize: They are no longer to confine their mission to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 10.5), to whom both John and Jesus directed their ministries, but are now sent to all nations. There is substantial support for this reading among contemporary New Testament scholars. For example, Davies and Allison comment that Matthew 28.16-20 reveals Matthew's understanding of the resurrection as the

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<sup>446</sup>As Ben Witherington points out, "Matthew 28.19-20 is the only statement that we have anywhere about... the beginnings of a specifically Christian baptism as initiated by Christ." Witherington III, *Troubled Waters*, 53. Everett Fergusson takes the uniqueness of Matthew 28.19 as an argument in favour of its historicity as the origin of Christian baptism, suggesting that "no more likely explanation of the general, if not indeed universal, adoption of the practice of baptism by Jesus' disciples after his resurrection has been advanced than that there was some authorization by Jesus himself," and that "without some such directive from Jesus it is hard to account for the general acceptance of baptism in all parts of the church from its earliest days, and a post-resurrection setting is most likely for such a directive." Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 133. Ferguson does not, however, address the argument for baptismal continuity from John, through Jesus, to the early church, nor the argument that Matthew 28.19 is a missional rather than a baptismal command; though the missional emphasis of the passage is perhaps implicit in Ferguson's suggestion that the focus of Matthew 28.18-20 is on the authority of Jesus to commission his followers "to make disciples of *all* nations... to keep *all* his commands." Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 138.

<sup>447</sup>Scholars whose work has been important for the formulation of the argument of this chapter include R.T. France, John Nolland, Joel Green, and John Meier. See R.T. France, "Jesus the Baptist?" in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. J.B. Green and M. Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 94–111; R. T. France, *Matthew*; Green, "From 'John's Baptism'"; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*; Nolland, "In Such a Manner"; Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*; Nolland, *Matthew*; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Volume Two*.

exaltation of Jesus as Lord of all, as a new Moses sending his disciples out among the Gentiles.<sup>448</sup>

Furthermore, noting that Matthew 28 offers little in the way of explaining what baptism is about, John Nolland suggests that the author of Matthew understands water-baptism as having already been introduced in the account of John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism by John.<sup>449</sup> According to Nolland, Jesus' instruction to baptize "takes us back, not to the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, but beyond that to the baptizing activity of John the Baptist that preceded Jesus' own ministry and to which he related himself positively by his insistence on submitting to baptism at John's hands."<sup>450</sup> The baptism that the disciples are commanded to take to the nations is the baptism of repentance which John announced, and which Jesus received. Similarly, Davies and Allison suggest that in Matthew baptism is presented "as a following of the example of Jesus" who was himself baptized.<sup>451</sup> It is John's baptism of repentance in view of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven that the disciples are to take to the nations, though in light of the resurrection it is a baptism of repentance understood with reference to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 688. This basic argument is supported by Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 883, Nolland, *Matthew*, 1266, R. T. France, *Matthew*, 1108.

<sup>449</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, 1267–68. Nolland also discusses this point in Nolland, "‘In Such a Manner’," 76–80. See also the discussion in R. T. France, *Matthew*, 1116.

<sup>450</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, 1267.

<sup>451</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 684–85. See also Davies and Allison's discussion of "righteousness" in Matthew as consisting of the imitation of Christ, Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 345. With reference to the baptism of Jesus in Matthew, Nolland comments: "Matthew makes it quite clear that the opening of heaven, the descent of the Spirit and the heavenly voice, while they follow on from the baptism, are clearly distinguished from the baptism itself; from baptism at the hands of John, Jesus moves on immediately to an appointment with God himself. I conclude that there is no specific link between Jesus' baptism and Christian baptism as a baptism to be distinguished from John's baptism." Nolland, "‘In Such a Manner’," 76. The final clause in this quote is crucial. To say that there is no link between Jesus' baptism and Christian baptism *as a baptism to be distinguished from John's baptism*, is not to say that there is no link between Jesus' baptism and Christian baptism if Christian baptism is not understood to be distinguished fundamentally from John's.

<sup>452</sup> Nolland suggests that Matthew 28.19 appears to be a restaging of John's baptism in a new situation, but with the addition of the triadic formula. The answer to the question of how the triadic formula changes the nature of the baptism "will depend on how we understand 'in [εἰς] the name' and on what role we should attribute to the mentioning in sequence of Father, Son and Holy

A difficulty with this understanding of Matthew 28 is that it raises the question of why there is so little mention of baptism between Jesus' baptism by John and Matthew 28. Nolland accounts for this by the assumption "that those who respond to Jesus' ministry have already been baptized by John."<sup>453</sup> It is because of the expansion of the ministry to include non-Jews, to those who have not heard or responded to John's proclamation and baptism, that baptism appears in Matthew 28.<sup>454</sup>

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Spirit." Noting that the closest Matthean parallel, Jesus' promised presence with those "gathered in [εἰς]" his name (18.20), appears to be an expression of solidarity connoting loyalty and belonging, Nolland suggests a similar solidarity is expressed in Matthew 28.19. Being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is to express solidarity with God, with Jesus, and with the Spirit of God. Nolland, "'In Such a Manner,'" 78–79.

<sup>453</sup>Nolland, *Matthew*, 14. See also Nolland's discussion of the explicit mention of this in Luke 7.29-30, Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 342–43.

<sup>454</sup>Nolland, *Matthew*, 142, 1267–68. See also Nolland, "'In Such a Manner,'" 78. An alternative explanation is provided by Richard France. Where Nolland envisions that Jesus' ministry assumed the prior baptismal ministry of John, France suggests that Jesus and his disciples continued John's practice of baptism. France explains the absence of any mention of this in the Synoptic accounts of Jesus ministry by an appeal to the taken-for-granted nature of this rite. He suggests that it is quite possible that Matthew "simply saw no need to mention what the church in his day took for granted, that both water baptism and baptism 'in the Holy Spirit and fire' had their proper place within the Jesus movement, and that 28:19 brings to the surface what had been happening unmentioned during Jesus' ministry as well as in the post-Easter period as we know it from Acts." R.T. France, "Jesus the Baptist?" 99. See also R. T. France, *Matthew*, 1116. Travis McMaken discusses the role of Matthew 28.16-20 in Barth's doctrine of baptism, suggesting that in IV/4 Barth's understanding of Matthew 28 increasingly emphasized the theme of mission at the expense of the themes of authority and institution. Noting also that Barth emphasized the role of baptism in the beginning of the Christian life, "as the sacrament of initiation or, in his language, as the Foundation of the Christian Life," at the expense of understanding it as a "an instituted form of its proclamatory mission," McMaken suggests that baptism is itself a proclamation of the gospel, bearing "powerful witness to the salvation obtained 'for us, but without us' by Jesus Christ." W. Travis McMaken, "Authority, Mission, and Institution: A Systematic Consideration of Matthew 28.18–20 in Karl Barth's Doctrine of Baptism," *Ecclesiology* 5 (2009): 360–61. While McMaken's is "a systematic exploration of the interpretation of Barth's theology rather than an exegetical treatment of the Matthean pericope," it seems to me that his proposal runs against the grain of the Biblical text. In Matthew 28 the emphasis is that the disciples are sent on a mission to the nations on Jesus' authority, rather than that Jesus has given them his authority. Furthermore, as Barth points out, the New Testament does not make baptism an element of gospel proclamation, but does connect it with initiation and ethics. McMaken, "Authority, Mission, and Institution," 347.

## 4.2 Beginning with John the Baptist

The views of Davies and Allison, Nolland, and France reflect a wide recognition among biblical scholars that the story of Jesus begins with the ministry of John the Baptist.<sup>455</sup> Thus, in *Jesus Remembered*, James Dunn notes that there is wide recognition that “Jesus began, properly speaking, as a disciple of John.”<sup>456</sup> There is broad agreement that Jesus was baptized by John, and that the Fourth Gospel portrays Jesus’ ministry overlapping with John’s for a time. As Dunn observes, the Gospel of John portrays Jesus as having taking his disciples from among the disciples of John (John 1.35-42), and becoming seen as a more successful competitor to John. Commenting on the report that Jesus was baptizing more people than John (John 3.26; 4.1), Dunn notes that “this testimony is given more credibility by the Fourth Evangelist’s haste to deny it: ‘it was not Jesus himself who baptized but his disciples’ (4.2).”<sup>457</sup> Given the embarrassment that at least some in the primitive community felt about Jesus being baptized by John,<sup>458</sup> this testimony that Jesus’ ministry involved baptism, whether by himself or his disciples, gains historical credibility.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>455</sup>While it is most clear in Mark, Dunn notes that the Baptist is the beginning of the Gospel in all strands of the tradition; Matthew presenting both John and Jesus as proclaiming the same message of repentance (Mt 3.2=4.17); Luke describing both John and Jesus as preaching good news (Lk 3.18; 4.18); John’s prologue includes the Baptist; and in Acts the criteria for someone to replace Judas is that a person was to have been among them from the baptism of John (Acts 1.21-22). James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 352–54. See also R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 95. In this regard, France quotes Ben Meyers judgment that “the beginning of Jesus’ public career is inextricably bound up with the public career of John the Baptist.” B. F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), 128.

<sup>456</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 350. On this, Dunn refers the reader to E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 91; Webb, “John the Baptist,” 214–18; R. W. Funk, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 27–28, 54.

<sup>457</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 351.

<sup>458</sup>The tradition’s uneasiness concerning Jesus receiving a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins is reflected in Matthew in the exchange between John and Jesus prior to his baptism and the lack of mention of “forgiveness of sins” in connection with John’s baptism. In Matthew forgiveness is connected to Jesus’ blood alone (Matthew 26.28). Furthermore, as Dunn points out, the Synoptics “seem to go out of their way to draw a veil over any period of overlap between Jesus and John. Mark 1.14 makes a point of noting that Jesus began his own mission in Galilee only ‘after John was arrested’ (followed by Matt. 4.12). And Luke marks out the distance between John and Jesus even more pointedly. He inserts the account of John’s



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imprisonment by Herod Antipas right into the middle of his account of John (Luke 3.18-20).” James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 352.

<sup>459</sup>While Dunn notes that it lends historical credibility to the claim that Jesus baptism marked the beginning of his ministry, John Meier presents a compelling argument along these lines. Noting that one of the themes in the Fourth Gospel is “a polemic against an overly exalted estimation of John by the followers of the Baptist who later refused to become Christians,” Meier points out that the portrayal of Jesus drawing his disciples from among those of the Baptist, and Jesus having his own baptizing ministry run counter to the redactional intent of the Fourth Evangelist. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Volume Two*, 166. The following argument is found in John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Volume Two*, 121–24. Meier suggests that the inclusion of this portrayal of Jesus as a disciple of John may be because Jesus’ early baptizing ministry “was too deeply rooted in the Johannine tradition and too widely known to friend and foe alike simply to be omitted,” though “at a later stage of the Gospel’s composition, the heavy-handed redactor considered the datum too dangerous to stand unchallenged, and so he ‘explains it away’ in a not very credible fashion. Interestingly, though, not even he dares to expunge the embarrassing tradition from the Gospel.” (122) The theme of Jesus baptizing is picked up again in John 4.1, where Jesus is baptizing and making disciples (Meier notes that in John the disciples are not sent until after the resurrection). Meier points out, then, that the statement in 4.2 that it was Jesus’ disciples rather than Jesus himself who was baptizing “flatly contradicts the entire picture of contrast and conflict, jealousy and humility, that the Evangelist has so carefully constructed by placing the baptizing Jesus and the baptizing John side by side - a contrast repeated for the inattentive in 4.1.” (121) Given that the style of the Greek of 4.2 also differs from that of the rest of the Fourth Gospel, Meier argues that this is clearly a case of a Johannine redactor amending the text: “He apparently found the idea of Jesus baptizing objectionable, and in his usual wooden, mechanical way he issues a ‘clarification’ correcting any false impression the narrative might give. Thus, the final redactor supplies us with perhaps the best NT example of how the criterion of embarrassment works.” (122) Admitting that historical scholars will differ in their assessments of the degree of probability of these arguments, Meier’s view is “that Jesus’ remaining with John for a while as his disciple, his drawing some of his first disciples from John’s circle, and his continuation of the rite of baptism in his own ministry is the more probable hypothesis - more probable, that is, than the suggestion that all this was made up (for what reason?) by the Fourth Evangelist or the tradition before him.” (123) And while Meier’s argument for the historicity of the testimony of the Fourth Gospel draws primarily on the criterion of embarrassment, he notes that the criterion of coherence lends further support: “If one grants that deciding to accept John’s message and submit to his baptism was a pivotal event in Jesus’ religious life, then it makes perfect sense that Jesus might spend some time with John after his baptism and, when leaving to start his own mission, might take with him not only some like-minded disciples of John but also the practice of the ritual that had been so meaningful to him.” (122) Meier concludes: “It is hardly surprising that a Jew who had just recently gone out of his way to journey to the Jordan to hear John and to accept his baptism should pattern his own religious life, at least to some degree, on that of his religious mentor. It would be the opposite line of action that would need a great deal of explanation (124). For an argument that Meier overstates his case, see J. Ramsey Michaels, “Baptism and Conversion in John: A Particular Baptist Reading,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Essays in Honour of R.E.O. White*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 136–56. Martinus De Boer also argues that the Johannine material points to a belief that Jesus baptized throughout his ministry, drawing particularly on 1 John 5.5-8. See Martinus de Boer, “Jesus the Baptizer: 1 John 5:5–8 and the Gospel of John,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 1 (1988): 94–105.

However, in spite of Dunn's agreement that Jesus' ministry is rooted in that of John the Baptist, he argues that Christian baptism is based in a command of the risen Jesus rather than in the practice of John the Baptist. Dunn argues that, while baptism may have been part of the ministry of Jesus, or at least his disciples, during the period of overlap with John, the "thunderous silence" regarding any baptismal ministry in the Synoptic Gospels implies that "he or they ceased the practice when Jesus began his own distinctive Galilean mission."<sup>460</sup> Making reference to Matthew 28.19, Dunn argues that "since the first Christians trace their practice to a post-Easter revelation and since the only hint that Jesus may have continued John's practice for a time (John 4.2) is quickly refuted, we have little choice but to conclude that Jesus himself did not baptize during the bulk of his mission, that is, the mission recorded by the Synoptic Evangelists."<sup>461</sup> Noting that some have argued that Jesus continued to baptize throughout his ministry, Dunn states that "on this hypothesis, the complete silence of the Synoptic tradition regarding Jesus' continued baptismal practice is quite simply baffling."<sup>462</sup>

#### 4.2.1 Dunn's argument for a hiatus between John and the Church

However, Dunn's account raises questions of its own: if, as Dunn suggests, Jesus set aside the practice of baptism, how are we to explain this. Why would Jesus set aside a practice so important for the beginning of his own ministry? Given Dunn's admission that "Jesus' mission fits neatly between two missions marked out by the practice of baptism (the Baptist's and the

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<sup>460</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 606.

<sup>461</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 606. Dunn also makes reference here to the longer ending that was added to Mark (16.16), and directs the reader to volume 2.

<sup>462</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 606. For arguments that Jesus continued to baptize throughout his ministry, Dunn refers to R. T. France, "Jesus the Baptist?" 105–07; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Volume Two*, 126–29, 166–67; Taylor, *The Immerser*, 294–99. While Meier does not engage with Dunn, writing prior to Dunn's work on this issue, he engages extensively with Paul Hollenbach who, like Dunn, argues that Jesus took up John's practice of baptism but subsequently set it aside. See P. W. Hollenbach, "The Conversion of Jesus: From Jesus the Baptizer to Jesus the Healer," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.25.1 (1982): 196–219.

post-Easter Jerusalem community of his followers), with lines of influence and continuity linking all three,” one might well wonder why Jesus set baptism aside.<sup>463</sup>

Dunn’s proposal is that Jesus’ set aside baptism because such a rite of initiation would be a barrier to open fellowship.<sup>464</sup> According to Dunn, one of baptism’s functions was to be a boundary marker. While he argues that, as a preparation for the Coming One,<sup>465</sup> John’s baptism was primarily preparatory and transitional rather than initiatory, Dunn asserts that it also functioned as a ritual of initiation or rite of passage.<sup>466</sup> Through John’s baptism a person joined the company of others who were similarly prepared for the coming baptism in Spirit and fire of which John spoke, and in this sense John’s baptism can be understood as a ritual of initiation even as it was preparatory:

In [John’s] hand [baptism] formed a preparatory gateway which by passing through one prepared for the baptism of the one to come. It formed a rite of passage, analogous in function, despite its once-only administration, to the purificatory baths necessary for membership of the Qumran community and prior to members’ participation in the common meal. At the other end of Jesus’ mission, at the very beginning of the post-Easter community,

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<sup>463</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 607.

<sup>464</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 607.

<sup>465</sup>John likely didn’t know who the Stronger One might be: “In historical terms, John may simply have had a conviction that someone much more significant was to follow, and that he had to baptize in preparation for a much more fearful baptism.” James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 371. Note, similarly, John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Volume Two*, 35, 132.

<sup>466</sup>Dunn argues that John’s baptism was not primarily a rite of initiation, but was rather primarily a rite of preparation. While he admits that John “seems to have attracted a band of disciples which may have maintained a recognizable identity long after his death,” making reference to Acts 19.1-7, as well as “the clear polemical note in the Fourth Gospel against overestimating John’s significance,” Dunn questions whether John intended to create a band of disciples, or that he saw them as representative of Israel. He argues that “the argument that John’s baptism was ‘initiatory’ ignores the stronger indications that it was provisional and transitional in preparation for the more important baptism to come.” See James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 349–50, where he criticizes the view expressed by Robert Webb. See Webb, “John the Baptist,” 194–96, 205–06.

baptism reemerges - and again as an indispensable rite of passage for those committing themselves to the new community.<sup>467</sup>

Dunn argues that it was as such a boundary marker that Jesus set baptism aside during his Galilean ministry.

Dunn supports this view by placing the issue of baptism within the context of a broader shift of emphasis in Jesus' ministry. While acknowledging elements of continuity between the mission of Jesus and that of John, Dunn notes that there is a shift of emphasis, where Jesus' teaching also contains an "already here" motif. According to Dunn, it is this motif that represents "the chief difference between the preaching of John and that of Jesus."<sup>468</sup> This difference is evident in the scene where the disciples of the imprisoned Baptist ask whether Jesus is the one to come. Jesus responds: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."<sup>469</sup> Here Jesus' answer focuses on the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies concerning the blind seeing, the lame walking, and the poor having good news announced, in contrast to John's relative emphasis on the coming wrath. Without denying the element of judgment in Jesus' ministry, Dunn suggests that Jesus' response "says in effect that John had neglected the other, more positive expectation of restoration, good news, and new life."<sup>470</sup> Dunn suggests that this might very well have been scandalous to John: "It

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<sup>467</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 606.

<sup>468</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 445. Dunn concludes his discussion of the relationship between the ministries of John and Jesus by suggesting that the kingdom which John announced was active in and through Jesus' mission: "The relation between the two was conceived in terms of a significant transition having taken place. There was a note of fulfilled expectation, of long-desired blessings now happening, of the celebration that was consequently appropriate... it would hardly distort the evidence to sum up the emphasis in terms of the kingdom being already active in and through Jesus' mission, in contrast to that of the Baptist." James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 454–55.

<sup>469</sup> Matthew 11:2-6/Luke 7.18-23.

<sup>470</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 450. Dunn notes that Jesus' omits the note of judgment which the Baptist focussed on, noting, for example, that in Luke 4.19-20 Jesus ends his reading of Isa 61.1-2 just before the phrase 'and the day of vengeance of our God'. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 449. See also Dale C. Allison, *The Intertextual Jesus: Scripture in Q* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 113.

should occasion no surprise if Jesus acknowledge the likelihood of the Baptist taking offense at one of his circle striking out on his own and with an emphasis which cut across John's (cf. John 3.25-26).<sup>471</sup>

Dunn then connects Jesus' emphasis on forgiveness and good news to his vision of open fellowship, a vision that stood in contrast with the factionalism of his day.<sup>472</sup> In a context where "table fellowship functioned as a social boundary," Dunn notes that Jesus practice of eating and drinking put him in conflict with groups such as the Pharisees or Essenes who saw Jesus defiling himself by the company he kept: "Jesus ... enacted an *open* table-fellowship: he himself was open to invitations from a wide range of people; he was notorious for eating with tax-collectors and sinners. Holiness for Jesus, we might say, was not a negative, excluding force, but a positive, including force."<sup>473</sup> As Dunn sees it, then, Jesus rejected John's practice of baptism because it presented a barrier to this kind of open fellowship:

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<sup>471</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 450. Meier similarly suggests that this passage reflects a shift between John and Jesus: "Jesus is tacitly entreating his own rabbi to recognize in his former pupil the unexpected - and for John, disconcerting - consummation of John's plan for Israel." John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Volume Two*, 135. Meier advocates a balanced approach to the relationship between John and Jesus: "If Jesus is not an apostate from John's faith, neither is he simply some disciple or successor of John, faithfully carrying through the master's program. Both Hollenbach and Boers err by excess at either end of the spectrum." John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Volume Two*, 137 n.110. See Hollenbach, "The Conversion of Jesus" and Hendrikus Boers, *Who Was Jesus? The Historical Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>472</sup> Dunn notes: "Whereas others sought to protect Israel's special status before Yahweh by drawing tighter boundaries round the people of promise, Jesus sought to break down these boundaries and to create a fellowship which was essentially open rather than closed. His open table-fellowship, so much both constituting and characterizing the community which practiced it, made the point more clearly than any other aspect of his mission." James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 605.

<sup>473</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 603. On Jesus' concept of holiness, Dunn refers to M. J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998), 134–36. He finds a similar view expressed by Berger who suggested that "the concept of offensive holiness/purity is an essential building block for understanding the conflict of Jesus with the Pharisees" K. Berger, "Jesus als Pharisäer und frühe Christen als Pharisäer," *Novum Testamentum* 30 (1988): 246–47. See also Bruce Chilton, *Jesus' Baptism and Jesus' Healing: His Personal Practice of Spirituality* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 58–71 and Scott McKnight, "A Parting Within the Way: Jesus and James on Israel and Purity," in *James the Just and Christian Origins*, ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 94–98.

Jesus did not baptize for the same reason that he did not fence his table-fellowship with purity restrictions. Even baptism could form too much of a ritual barrier, excluding those not (yet) prepared to undergo it for whatever reason. No less than the Baptist, Jesus called for repentance. But the repentance he looked for expressed itself not in terms of baptism, but in acts of loving concern (Mark 10.21 pars.) and restitution for wrong-doing (Luke 19.8).<sup>474</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Three problematic aspects of Dunn's argument

While the perspectives of some New Testament scholars (Davies and Allison, Nolland, and France) understand the origins of Christian baptism in a way that supports Barth's perspective, Dunn offers a contrary perspective. There are, however, three problematic aspects of Dunn's argument: (i) What kind of evidence is there that John's baptism was a barrier to the kind of open fellowship which Jesus practiced? (ii) If Jesus' message of the kingdom involved an open table fellowship that was incompatible with the practice of baptism, how can the re-introduction of this practice be explained? (iii) How can we make sense of the risen Jesus' instructing his followers to set up a barrier to table-fellowship that he himself rejected as incompatible with the good news of the kingdom?

Taking up the first of these issues, what kind of evidence is there that John's baptism was a barrier to the kind of open fellowship which Jesus practiced? The emphasis which Dunn places on baptism as a rite of initiation stands in tension with Dunn's earlier argument that John's baptism was *not* primarily initiatory but was rather "provisional and transitional in preparation for the more important baptism to come."<sup>475</sup> While acknowledging that a group of disciples likely formed around John, Dunn agrees with John Meier's judgment that John was not trying to set up a wilderness community or sect like Qumran. To the contrary, Meier observes that "after being baptized by John, most people apparently returned to their homes and occupations,"<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 607.

<sup>475</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 349 n.56.

<sup>476</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Volume Two*, 50.

noting that “at least one reference to [the disciples of John] (in the question about fasting) seems to place them in Galilee along with the Pharisees and the disciples of Jesus (Mark 2.18 par).”<sup>477</sup>

While John’s ministry was focused on the desert, he does not appear to have set up a bounded community within the desert. Far from being a ritual barrier meant to demarcate who was in or out of the covenant community, John’s baptism seems to have been more like a first step on a new path of faithfulness. As Dunn points out, John’s warning that God could from stones raise up children for Abraham was John’s protest against the kind of exclusive groups that are set up by rites of initiation and that are demarcated by boundary markers. As Dunn further explains, in contrast to the factions within Second Temple Judaism which “tended to meet the problem of Israel’s continuing sin and disloyalty by narrowing the covenant to those loyal to each particular sect...John met it... by recalling his hearers to the fact that God’s election in the first place was an act of sovereign freedom, and by calling them to repentance in the light of that sovereign choice.”<sup>478</sup> If, as Dunn argues here, John is understood as challenging factionalism within Israel, it would be odd if his baptism were understood as a rite of initiation that created a barrier to open fellowship.

Another element of Dunn’s argument is to portray a contrast between John’s call to express repentance through baptism and Jesus’ call to express it through ethical living, connecting this to their respective understanding’s of the present situation: “The Baptist saw the present only as opportunity to flee the wrath to come. Jesus saw the present as already manifesting the graciousness of God.”<sup>479</sup> However, this does not do justice to the significant continuity between the message of John and that of Jesus. Against the tendency to understand John in terms of an Old Testament prophet of judgment, in contrast to which the New Testament in Jesus shines all the more brightly, there has been an increasing recognition of the continuity between the message and ministry of John and Jesus.

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<sup>477</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Volume Two*, 50, 92 n.149.

<sup>478</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 365.

<sup>479</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 455. While Dunn’s emphasis on the judgmental aspect of John’s message may reflect his use of Q material to arrive at the “historical John,” even the Q material upon which Dunn builds his discussion of John’s message includes John’s warning that those who come for baptism must produce fruits worthy of repentance.

John, like Jesus, saw the present as an opportunity to express repentance through ethical living. His words of judgment were accompanied by a clear warning that those who came to him for baptism must produce fruits worthy of repentance. John's baptism is only a first step in the right direction, after which other steps must follow: only the trees that bear good fruit will escape being cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 3.7-11, Luke 3: 7-9). Luke's narration of Jesus' response to the crowds' question about what they should do further clarifies that the fruits which John enjoined people to produce were precisely the kinds of acts of loving concern for neighbour and restitution which Jesus also called his followers to (Luke 3.10-14). As Nolland puts it, "baptismal forgiveness is only a shelter for those who live out a readiness for the day or wrath. Neither baptism nor appeal to the merits of Abraham will substitute for the personal need of a right orientation to God and his will."<sup>480</sup> The turning which John called for was to be the beginning of walking a new path of faithfulness. The primitive community remembered a continuity between the ethical thrust of Jesus and the preaching of John the Baptist.

The portrayal of the relationship between John and Jesus more broadly in the Synoptics reflects this continuity between John and Jesus. This can be seen most clearly in Matthew's gospel where both John and Jesus announce the imminent inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 3.2; 4.17). France has noted that this is part of a broader pattern in Matthew's Gospel, where "almost every phrase of Matthew's account of John's preaching is echoed, in content and often in phraseology,

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<sup>480</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 148. Nolland notes further that there is a clear continuity between Luke's portrayal of John's message and that of Jesus: "Repentance bears its fruit in relationships between individuals in society. This focus on the individual in relationship to others is also characteristic of Jesus (Luke 3.6-9, 34-35; 19.41-44; 45-46; 21.5-24)." Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 149. Joel Green similarly notes the social-ethical thrust of John's message: "John's ministry defies neat categorization, for its religious and covenantal roots of necessity blossomed in socio-political economic justice...[John was] calling people out of normal social existence in order to align themselves fundamentally with God's eschatological, redemptive purpose." Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 164. Noting that Luke gives more attention to the content of John's message than to the act of baptism itself, Green suggests that John called people to: "1) come away from their normal lives to participate in John's ministry through baptism, 2) undergo a repentance-baptism signifying their (re)new(ed) allegiance to God's purpose, and 3) return to their normal lives having accepted the challenge to reflect in their lives ways of living appropriate to true children of Abraham." For Green, "John's proclamation ensures that his baptism is understood as an assault on the status quo, that to participate in his baptism is to embrace behaviours rooted in a radical realignment with God's purpose," in ways that relate not only to large-scale social injustices but also the "realities of day-to-day existence." Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 173-74. John's baptism was a "repentance-baptism, a cleansing by which one's life is oriented anew around the service of God, especially in the context of interpersonal relations and care for the poor, and in daily occupation." Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 181.



in his subsequent presentation of the teaching of Jesus.<sup>481</sup> In addition to announcing the inbreaking of the kingdom, in Matthew both John and Jesus address the Pharisees and Sadducees as a brood of vipers (Mt 3.7; 12.34; 23.33), both call for people bearing fruit (Mt 3.8; 7.16-20; 12.33), both express the idea that the heirs of Abraham may be replaced or cast out (Mt 3.9; 8.11-12), both warn that fruitless trees will be cut down (Mt 3.10; 7.19), and that grain and chaff will be separated (Mt 3.12; 13.30).<sup>482</sup> It is in view of these parallels, that Nolland observes that “in the Matthean context the content of John’s call to repentance merges into that of Jesus’ call as it emerges in the unfolding of the Gospel, and this in turn merges into the call to discipleship in the context of the postresurrection church.”<sup>483</sup>

Furthermore, Jesus addresses the question of his relationship with John the Baptist directly in Matthew 11. After the episode where John’s disciples ask Jesus if he is the one to come (11.2-6), Jesus addresses the crowds, expressing appreciation and respect for John as the Isaianic messenger, as the Elijah to come (11.9-15, 17.12). While John’s ascetic lifestyle of fasting is set in contrast to Jesus’ practices of feasting, both are portrayed as “representing the wisdom of God against the unresponsiveness of ‘this generation’” (11.16-21).<sup>484</sup> In Matthew’s Gospel this shift in lifestyle between the ministry of John and that of Jesus is not portrayed as a shift in message, but as reflecting that in Jesus the one for whom John prepared the way had come. Thus, when John’s disciples ask Jesus why his disciples do not fast, he tells them that the wedding guests feast when in the presence of the bridegroom (Matthew 9.14-15).

The continuity between John and Jesus is further reinforced when Jesus responds to the question about the origin of his authority with a counter-question about the origins of John’s ministry. France suggest that in doing so Jesus is not just trying to avoid giving a straight answer to their

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<sup>481</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 96.

<sup>482</sup> In view of Dunn’s argument, it is particularly noteworthy that the parallels include John’s message of judgment. Both Davies and Allison and Nolland confirm France’s portrayal of the “high degree of parallelism” between John and Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. See Nolland, *Matthew*, 137 and Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 289. It is Nolland’s judgment that Matthew presents Jesus as “carrying forward the mission begun by the preparer (3.3).” Nolland, *Matthew*, 154.

<sup>483</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, 144.

<sup>484</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 97.

question, but is making “a clear claim to a continuity of mission: the authority by which John operated is that of Jesus also.”<sup>485</sup> Matthew follows this episode with a parable which indicates that the leader’s “attitude to John’s ‘way of righteousness’ is a ready indicator of their response to Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom of God. To reject the one is to prove themselves unfit for the other.”<sup>486</sup>

A similar argument for continuity between Jesus and John can be made concerning Luke’s Gospel. The common ethical thrust of the ministries John and Jesus discussed above are part of a larger pattern of connection between John and Jesus in Luke. John and Jesus are bound together by a close parallelism in Luke’s infancy narratives, Zechariah’s benediction preparing the reader to understand that “John in a preliminary and Jesus in an ultimate way will be the instruments of the end-time outpouring of the tender mercies of God.”<sup>487</sup>

While Luke’s John does not announce the kingdom in the way that Matthew’s does, John’s message is described as “good news.” Noting that the language of “*κηρύσσω*, ‘preaching,’ and *εὐηγγελίζετο*, ‘he evangelized,’” which are used to describe John’s ministry in Luke 3 are subsequently used to describe the ministry of Jesus in Luke 4.18-19, Nolland warns “against any sharp separation of John and Jesus: not the message, but the state of fulfillment differed.”<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 97.

<sup>486</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 97. See also Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, III.160. France argues that “Jesus was, in more than a merely chronological sense, John’s successor,” and that Jesus “identified himself closely with John’s mission and understood himself as carrying it out where John had left off.” R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 97. France notes’s Conzelmann’s observation “that Luke deliberately separates John from Jesus, so that he is not even Jesus’ forerunner, but merely ‘the greatest prophet’” but also notes Fitzmyer’s defence of the the traditional view that Luke understood John as Jesus’ precursor, though with a less defined sense of continuity than we find in Matthew.” R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 97 n.11. See Conzelmann, *Theology of St Luke* (London: Faber, 1960), 20–27 and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 102–10. Richard Erickson suggests that the removal of John from Luke’s narrative prior to the account of Jesus’ baptism is reflects a polemic aimed at existing communities of followers of John the Baptist. See Erickson, “The Jailing of John”.

<sup>487</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 92.

<sup>488</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 140–41. Here the question of Luke’s understanding of salvation history becomes important. Nolland suggests that Luke’s understanding of history should be understood in terms of “stages of fulfillment” rather than in terms of distinct stages of salvation: The message is the same, though it is experienced differently. Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 144. Nolland is

The continuity between John and Jesus is further reinforced when John's proclamation of "repentance for release of sins" (Luke 3.3) is echoed in Jesus' proclamation of release for captives in Luke 4.18, as well as in Jesus' authority to "release sin" and in his calling sinners to repentance in Luke 5.17-32.<sup>489</sup> The material where Jesus addresses his relationship with John the Baptist in Luke 7 is parallel to that in Matthew 11. Acknowledging that some have interpreted this passage as a rejection of the Baptist's expectation of judgment, Nolland notes that "the judgment motif is not absent from Jesus' ministry (e.g., 6.24-26; 10.13-15)." Here, however, Jesus' answer to John's disciples places the emphasis on the good news rather than on judgment in order to "focus John's attention" on the fact that "there is more graciousness in God's purposes than John dreamed of."<sup>490</sup>

As in Matthew, so in Luke Jesus expresses respect and appreciation for John as the Isaianic messenger (7.24-27), and Luke, like Matthew, portrays John's fasting and Jesus' feasting as representing the Wisdom of God: "It is God's wisdom that stands behind the actions of John and

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one of a number of scholars who reject Conzelmann's widely influential thesis that Luke understood John and Jesus to be parts of different phases of salvation history. In support of his position, Nolland notes that Conzelmann ignores the paralleling of Jesus and John in Luke's infancy narratives, and places too much weight on the fact that Luke narrates John's imprisonment before narrating Jesus' baptism. Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 19. Nolland points out that Mark's account also concludes John's ministry before narrating that of Jesus, suggesting that "Luke simply carries this through to a literary separation of the sections of his account devoted to the two figures. Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 156. Similarly, Joel Green suggests that in Luke's account "the separation of Jesus' baptism from the others is dramatically motivated, allowing Jesus alone to occupy the center of our attention from his baptism onward. Hence, these two verses [3.21-22] provide no basis for distinguishing the ministry of John and Jesus as belonging to two separate periods in salvation history." Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 162. Green's view reflects Tannehill's argument that the location of imprisonment of John in Luke's account is a narrative shift intended to focus the reader's attention on Jesus, but does not reflect a salvation-historical shift of epochs. Commenting on Luke 3.1-2, Tannehill remarks: "If the narrator had wished to make a distinct break between the periods of John and of Jesus, this could have been done by placing the dating at the beginning of Jesus' ministry rather than in its present position. As it is, the ministries of John and Jesus are presented as a continuous series of events that have their beginning with the coming of the word of God to John in the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius." Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 53. See also Green's argument in Green, "From 'John's Baptism'".

<sup>489</sup>Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity*, 51.

<sup>490</sup>Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 330-31. Nolland suggests that within the "in the Lukan frame we should think ... of the Lukan two-stage eschatology (cf. at 4.19): what John anticipated will come later on (cf. Acts 10.42; 17.31)."

Jesus, and Wisdom will in the end have its way and find its children.”<sup>491</sup> John and Jesus stand together within God’s plan of salvation, so that “by refusing to be baptized by [John], the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves” (7.29-30). Like Matthew, Luke treats John and Jesus together “as the representatives of God’s wise plan of salvation over against a largely unresponsive public.”<sup>492</sup>

The relationship between Jesus and John arises again in Luke 16.16-18, where Jesus declares that “the law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force.” According to Nolland, this similarly reflects Luke view of John as “already part of this new thing that is coming to pass in the ministry of Jesus.” Nolland understands this text to reflect the view that “the God who has been the God of the law and the prophets has now acted in a fresh and new way... Jesus and, in a preliminary way, John before him have been heralds introducing the new reality of the presence of the kingdom of God.”<sup>493</sup>

The connection between John and Jesus in Luke is further reinforced by Jesus’ question to the Pharisees concerning the origin of John’s baptism in Luke 20. Nolland observes that “the relevance of [Jesus’] question is based upon the significant parallel between the teaching of Jesus and the challenge and eschatological expectations associated with John (on the parallelism between John and Jesus see chaps. 1-2 and 7).”<sup>494</sup> Finally, when the risen Christ commissions the disciples to go to the nations, Nolland notes that “the message can be summarized as a call for repentance with a view to the forgiveness of sins. In Luke’s account, this was already John the Baptist’s message (see 3.3), but the story of salvation has developed since then: distinct to the

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<sup>491</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 347.

<sup>492</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 313. Green notes that Lk 7.29-30 “points to the division of Israel with respect to John’s mission, correlating refusal of John’s baptism with rejection of God’s purpose.” Green, “From ‘John’s Baptism,’” 162. Green notes that this parallelism extends to the whole of the Lukan birth narrative. See Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51-55.

<sup>493</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 822.

<sup>494</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 943.

present call to repentance and offer of forgiveness is the foundation in the death and resurrection of Jesus (the offer of the Spirit will also emerge as a new development).<sup>495</sup>

To conclude the discussion of this question, then, there is no direct evidence that John's baptism was a barrier to the kind of open fellowship that Jesus practiced. While John's baptism may have functioned as a rite of passage, it was a passage into a life of transformed social relationships in society rather than an entry into an exclusive community. While there was a shift of emphasis between John and Jesus, this shift is not portrayed in the Gospels as a discontinuity. Rather, the primitive community remembered a continuity between the ethical thrust of the Baptist and that of Jesus, John and Jesus being understood as together part of God's plan of salvation.

This brings us to a second problematic aspect of Dunn's account: Even if we grant Dunn's view that Jesus set aside baptism, we are left with the problem of explaining why it was reintroduced by the primitive community. *If* Jesus' message of the kingdom involved an open table fellowship that was incompatible with the practice of baptism, how can the re-introduction of this practice be explained?

Dunn's answer to this question is that the primitive community believed that they had received an instruction from the risen Christ to baptize. Acknowledging the historical questions surrounding Matthew 28.19, Dunn suggests that this text is rooted in a memory that was widely shared, "a memory of a revelation experience as from on high, or specifically of the risen Christ's commission including a command to baptize those who responded to the proclamation of the good news about him."<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>495</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1221. Furthermore, the mission which the risen Jesus enjoins upon his followers is the same as that of John, to proclaim "repentance for release of sins" (Luke 3.3; 24.47). This continuity extends into the mission of the primitive community when the beginning of Jesus' ministry is identified as the time of John's baptism (Acts 1.22; 10.37). Tannehill points to a number of elements in Luke's text which remind the reader that, in Luke, "Jesus and his witnesses, in fact, take over and continue the message of John the Baptist;" that in Luke's account, "John initiates a mission that will continue through Luke-Acts and reach out to the whole world." Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity*, 48. As noted earlier, it may be that Jesus speaking of his own fate in terms which link baptism and fire may be his interpretation and appropriation of John's announcement of a coming baptism in fire: "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!" (Luke 12.49-50). See also Mk 10.35-40.

<sup>496</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 186.

It is questionable, however, how widely shared this memory was. As discussed above, there is no direct evidence of this memory apart from Matthew 28.19. In particular, baptism is not mentioned when the risen Christ commissions the disciples in Luke 24, declaring that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed” to all nations. Furthermore, when the risen Christ mentions baptism in Acts 1, it is to assure the disciples that they would soon receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit which John had spoken about rather than to instruct them to baptize with water. If Christians baptized because of a memory of a direct command by the risen Christ, a command to take up a practice that Jesus set aside his own ministry, it is at least, as Dunn admits, “slightly odd” that Luke does not record this.<sup>497</sup>

Dunn offers two possible explanations for this omission: First, he suggests that Luke might have intended his readers to understand that “repentance and forgiveness of sins” implied baptism; and secondly, he suggests that Luke’s introduction of baptism in Acts 2 rather than Luke 24 or Acts 1 may reflect Luke’s tendency to delay introducing elements of his story in order to highlight their later impact.<sup>498</sup> However, there are difficulties involved with both of these explanations.

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<sup>497</sup>In *Jesus on the Mountain* Terry Donaldson discusses the question of a primitive post-resurrection command that might lie behind Matthew 28.19. He discusses B.J. Hubbard’s treatment of the issue, and notes Meier’s suggestion that in addition to Matthew 28, Luke 24, John 20 and Mark 16, Hubbard should have considered the commissioning of Acts 1.6-11. Donaldson argues that “behind Mt 28.16-20 lies an early commissioning statement consisting of: (1) a declaration of exaltation and enthronement; (2) a mission and baptismal command; and (3) a promise of continuing divine support perhaps with reference to the Holy Spirit.” Terence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 171. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain*, 171. See J.P. Meier, “Two Disputed Questions in Matt 28.16–20,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 411f., 416. See also B.J. Hubbard, *The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning: An Exegesis of Matthew 28.16–20*, SBL Dissertation Series (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974), 101–28. It should be noted that, while Donaldson has included “a mission and baptismal command” in the early commissioning statement, baptism is not mentioned in three of the five relevant passages. Furthermore, Mark 16 is almost universally understood to be a later addition that borrows heavily from the other Gospels and so is not an independent source for such a primitive commissioning statement. Taking Mark 16 out of consideration, we have four passages, only one of which mentions baptism. However, it seems unlikely that baptism would have been omitted from any of the accounts of this commissioning event if this event was understood by the early Church as the institution of the practice of baptism. The lack of clear evidence that the risen Christ instituted baptism for his followers stands in strong contrast to the wide attestation for the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

<sup>498</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 186.

With regard to Luke 24, as with Matthew 28, an argument can be made that the focus of the command is missional rather than baptismal. Here, as in Acts 1.8, the risen Christ sends his disciples as witnesses, first to Jerusalem and then to the nations. Furthermore, if the echoing of John the Baptist's proclamation of repentance and forgiveness brings baptism to mind, this is precisely because it underlines the continuity between the missions of John, Jesus, and the early Christians in Luke's narrative. In view of this continuity, when Peter calls on his hearers to repent and be baptized in Acts 2 the reader is not directed back to a command of Jesus so much as to John's proclamation and baptism. This is precisely the argument made by Joel Green, noting that John's message of repentance and forgiveness (3.3) is echoed in Jesus' call to repentance (5.32) and declarations of forgiveness (7.48), and that it is this same message that characterizes the mission of the Christian movement (Luke 24.47 and Acts 2.38).<sup>499</sup>

Dunn's second point appeals to a pattern of delay in Luke, where Luke knew of an element of the Gospel story but delayed introducing it. For example, there are parts of Mark's Gospel which Luke omits in his Gospel, but which emerge in Acts.<sup>500</sup> The problem with applying this argument to the baptismal commission is that there is no clear evidence that Luke knew of a command by the risen Christ to baptize. Luke knew that Christians did baptize, and introduced it into his narrative in the context of Pentecost. Beyond that we have only supposition. Peter's exhortation to be baptized does not make any reference to an instruction of the risen Jesus. As a result, when Luke's readers learn through the mouth of Peter that Christians baptize, it may be that what Luke has delayed introducing is the fact that John's baptism was never set aside by Jesus and his followers. Perhaps here Luke is making explicit is that John's baptism was always assumed by

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<sup>499</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 163. See Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity*, 48–49; Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1221; Green, "From 'John's Baptism'" and the discussion of the continuity between John, Jesus and community above.

<sup>500</sup> Dunn notes that Luke omits various elements that are present in Mark's gospel in order to highlight the impact of certain developments in Acts. For example, Mark omits the accusation that Jesus threatened to destroy the Temple (Mark 14.58) in order to reserve the confrontation and split over the Temple for the Stephen episode (Acts 6-7), and omits Jesus' discussion of the clean and the unclean (Mark 7.19) in order to "reserve the full impact of Peter's 'conversion' on this point until the Cornelius episode (Acts 10). In Luke the death of John the Baptist (Mark 6.17-29) is delayed until Acts 24.24-26, and information from his first telling of Paul's conversion-commission is held back for the second, more dramatic, telling. James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 83.

Jesus and his followers, and is doing so in conjunction with the event of Pentecost in order to underline that the coming of the baptism with the Spirit did not render John's baptism obsolete.

Dunn's explanation for the lack of any independent attestation of the event narrated in Matthew 28.19 fails to convince. The literary isolation of Matthew 28.19 makes it doubtful that this text, or the event to which this text bears witness, explains the apparent ubiquity of water baptism in the primitive community, and the question of why the primitive community introduced a practice that Jesus set aside during his ministry is left unanswered.

And finally, there is the third problematic aspect of Dunn's argument: Even if we grant that Jesus abandoned baptism as a barrier to open fellowship, and that the primitive community took up baptism in obedience to a command of the risen Jesus, how can we make sense of the risen Jesus' instructing his followers to set up a barrier to table-fellowship that he himself rejected as incompatible with the good news of the kingdom?

Dunn's explanation is that baptism may have been reintroduced as a concrete expression of commitment to Jesus. Noting that the thing that marked Christian baptism off from that of John was that it was baptism "in the name of Jesus," Dunn suggests that baptism in the name of Jesus may have been a way to signal commitment to Jesus in his absence: "whereas during Jesus' own mission discipleship involved some degree of physical attachment to him, in Jesus' absence the act of being baptized gave an equivalent tangibility to the commitment to discipleship."<sup>501</sup> Making reference to Paul's discussion of baptism in 1 Cor 1.12-15, Dunn suggests that Christians were those "who belonged to the faction of Christ, who rallied under the name of Jesus Christ" and that "baptism would be the occasion for or expression of the first 'calling on his name,' as explicitly in Paul's own baptism (Acts 22.16), is the logical conclusion."<sup>502</sup> In view of this, Dunn argues that "more clearly than with the Baptist," Christian baptism was

an initiation rite, a rite marking the baptisand's transfer into a new grouping, a new sect, a sect mark by a committed discipleship of

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<sup>501</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 188.

<sup>502</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 188.



Jesus... Notwithstanding the importance of seeing the first Christians as Jews and as full members of the society of Second Temple Judaism, it is also important to recognize from the first the role of baptism ‘in the name of Jesus’ in the group formation and boundary marking which was in due course to result in Christianity’s distinct and separate identity among the religions of antiquity.<sup>503</sup>

It is noteworthy that Dunn’s description of Christian baptism portrays it as a being more strongly a boundary marker than was John’s. Such a portrayal of baptism only intensifies the problem of why Jesus would reintroduce it. On the one hand, Dunn would have it that Jesus abandons baptism as contrary to his mission because it is a boundary marker that is in conflict with the open fellowship that characterizes the kingdom, and on the other Dunn suggests that the risen Christ exhorts his followers to reintroduce the practice as they carry on his mission in order to provide a clear boundary marker to define who is within the “Jesus faction.” It is difficult to imagine why Jesus would instruct his disciples to practice something that he had abandoned as being contrary to his mission and message.

### 4.2.3 Jesus the “Baptist”

In view of the difficulties involved with Dunn’s position, I suggest that the view that Jesus took up a baptismal ministry from John and continued baptism throughout his ministry offers the simplest and most plausible explanation for the ubiquity of baptism within the primitive community. Acknowledging that the silence of the Synoptics is troubling, we might nevertheless ask with France: “If baptism both preceded and followed the historical ministry of Jesus, is an argument from silence sufficient grounds to assume that it was not a part of the ministry of Jesus too?”<sup>504</sup> Noting the continuity between the ministries of Jesus and John evident in the Gospel

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<sup>503</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 189.

<sup>504</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 105.

accounts, might we not ask: “is not the safer assumption that this central part of John’s mission also continued under his successor, unless there is specific evidence to the contrary?”<sup>505</sup>

As Dunn acknowledges, Jesus emerged from John’s circle and took up John’s practice of baptism. The basis for Dunn’s assertion that Jesus set baptism aside as he began his Galilean ministry is the lack of any direct evidence that Jesus baptized in the Synoptics. However, there is similarly no mention of Jesus’ early baptismal ministry in the Synoptics. If the Evangelists decided not to mention Jesus’ early baptismal ministry then perhaps we should not conclude too much from their failing to mention baptism during his Galilean ministry. As we discussed above, if there is no direct evidence in the Synoptics that Jesus baptized, neither is there evidence that he broke with John on the issue of baptism.

Furthermore, while Jesus’ practices of eating and drinking stood in contrast with John’s ascetic lifestyle, we have seen that the Synoptics picture of the relationship between John and Jesus emphasizes continuity rather than discontinuity. This portrayal of continuity is reinforced by the evidence in the Synoptic accounts that during his Galilean ministry Jesus continued to be associated with John, and was even thought by some to be John raised from the dead (Mk 6.14 par; Mk 8.28 par.).<sup>506</sup> Noting that “in Matt 14.12 it is to Jesus that John’s disciples naturally turn after their master’s death,” France asks: “Would so cordial a link have been maintained if Jesus had now abandoned the rite which had been the hallmark of their master’s ministry?”<sup>507</sup> And a similar question could be asked regarding the belief that Jesus was John the Baptist raised: Would anyone think that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead if Jesus had abandoned the rite which had been the hallmark of John’s ministry? Furthermore, the fact that the replacement for Judas had to be someone who had been one of Jesus’ followers “all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning with the baptism of John until the day when

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<sup>505</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 105.

<sup>506</sup> France notes that “there can be no doubt that it was in the context of John’s baptizing ministry that Jesus’ mission took shape, and there seems no reason to doubt the testimony of the Gospels that the model which naturally occurred to Jesus’ contemporaries in trying to categorize his ministry was that of a successor to the Baptist.” R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 94. See also R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 104–05.

<sup>507</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 106.

he was taken up” (Acts 1.22) suggests the continuing importance of John and John’s baptism for Jesus’ ministry.

In view of the preceding argument, the hypothesis that Jesus baptized throughout his ministry provides the best explanation for the universality of baptism as the taken-for-granted means of Christian initiation in the primitive community. While “Jesus’ command in Matt 28.19... might account for the immediate and universal acceptance of such an innovation,” with France I suggest that “it is a more economical explanation to interpret the silence of the Gospels as indicating the continuation of John’s rite of initiation, rather than its absence.”<sup>508</sup> And if Jesus or his disciples had been baptizing throughout his ministry, his instruction in Matthew 28 is not the introduction of a new rite that was similar to that of John the Baptist’s, but is an instruction that

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<sup>508</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 106. John Morgan-Wynne similarly suggests that Jesus’ baptismal ministry is probably a clue as to Christians baptized. John E. Morgan-Wynne, “References to Baptism in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Essays in Honour of R.E.O. White*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 121. Morgan-Wynne refers to Flemmington 1948, 34, C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 230 and Rowland, *Christian Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism* [London: SPCK, 1985]. Hartman also characterizes Christian baptism as an adoption of John’s baptism. Hartman, ‘*Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*’, 3. See Dinkler 1962a; Delling 1963; Lohfink 1976; G Barth 1981). Furthermore, Kilian McDonnell demonstrates the importance of the baptism of Jesus as a model for Christian baptism in the early church, suggesting that “from the beginning it was the dominant model for Christian baptism.” Kilian McDonnell, “Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 210. He finds evidence for that Jesus’ baptism had quasi-creedal status in Ignatius. Kilian McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 35, and was of central importance to the early Aramaic and Syrian traditions McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus*, 36–37. See Edward C. Ratcliff, “The Old Syrian Baptismal Tradition and Its Resettlement Under the Influence of Jerusalem in the Fourth Century,” in *Liturgical Studies*, ed. Arther Hubert Couratin and David H. Tripp (London: SPCK, 1976); Sebastian Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Liturgy*, The Syrian Church Series (Poona/Kottayam, India, 1979); Gabriele Winkler, “A Remarkable Shift in the 4th-Century Creeds: An Analysis of the Armenian, Syriac, and Greek Evidence,” *Studia Patristica* (1982), 1396–401. McDonnell also demonstrates that Jesus’ baptism was understood as a model for Christian baptism within the Western Tradition into the late-fourth or early fifth century, suggesting that for Hilary of Poitiers (ca 315-367) “The baptism of Christ is proleptic, and is both order and image of our baptism and of the Christian life” McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus*, 45. He notes that Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca 350-428) explained that Christians are baptized “in the same baptism as that in which Christ... was baptized.” Alphonse Mingana, ed., *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord’s Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1935), 66. See also McDonnell, “Jesus’ Baptism,” 214, 227, 236. R. L. Wilckens similarly presents evidence that the early church gave “theological basis to baptismal practice by rooting it in Jesus’ own baptism.” Robert L. Wilken, “The Interpretation of the Baptism of Jesus in the Later Fathers,” *Studia Patristica* 11, pt. 2 (1972): 274 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1972).

the disciples are to continue the practice that has been the “normal and expected visible form of ‘disciple-making’ throughout Jesus ministry” as they bring the good news to the nations.<sup>509</sup>

Thus the difference between the baptism of John and that practiced by the primitive community is not that the former was a baptism with water and that the latter is a baptism with water and Spirit. The difference is that, in light of the resurrection, the primitive community understood the allegiance to God’s purpose involved allegiance to Jesus Christ, whose blood was poured out for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26.28) so that “Jesus the Baptizer takes his place alongside Father and Holy Spirit as the object of... baptism.”<sup>510</sup> In light of the resurrection it becomes clear that Jesus is the Stronger One to whom John bore witness, so that baptism now takes place in explicit connection with Jesus and the Spirit which came upon those committed to Jesus.<sup>511</sup>

### 4.3 Conclusion

This chapter makes a strong case in favour of Barth’s contention that the basis of Christian baptism is the baptism of John the Baptist, and particularly Jesus’ baptism by John. The ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus’ baptism by John, like the practice of baptism itself, appears to have been understood as important to the Gospel tradition *semper ubique ab omnibus*, in contrast to the literary isolation of Jesus’ words in Matthew 28.19. Jesus’ instruction to baptize all nations appears to have either not been known by the Markan, Lukan, and Johannine communities, or it was not considered important enough to be included in their accounts of Jesus. In either case,

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<sup>509</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 109.

<sup>510</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 110. France further suggests that it is the recognition of Jesus as the one who baptizes with the Spirit that differentiates John’s baptism from that of the primitive community, and which required that “those who have been baptized only with the baptism of John stand in need of further instruction (Acts 18.24-26), and even of rebaptism (19.1-17). R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 110. Furthermore commenting on Matthew 28.19, France notes both that baptism is portrayed along with teaching as an element of disciple-making. As R. Brow has pointed out, “the Christian church to be understood on the model of a school, in which people are enrolled, by baptism, *in orderto* learn. The baptized community is a community of learners, not of those who have already arrived. Baptism is a mark of commitment to learn, not a sort of ‘graduation’.” R. T. France, *Matthew*, 109. See R. Brow, *Go Make Learners: A New Model for Discipleship in the Church* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1981).

<sup>511</sup> See also Nolland’s discussion of the triadic expression in Matthew 28.19 as an expressing loyalty and solidarity with God, Jesus and the Spirit, mentioned already in note 7 above.

Jesus' words about baptism in Matthew 28.19 do not appear to have been central to these other streams of the tradition, and they likely would have been if they were understood to be the institution of Christian baptism. The attestation of a post-resurrection command to baptize stands in stark contrast to the attestation of John's baptism and Jesus' baptism by John, as well as of the institution of the Lord's Supper.<sup>512</sup> The ubiquity of baptism in the primitive community is more adequately accounted for if the basis of Christian baptism is Jesus' baptism by John than by appealing to a post-resurrection command of Jesus. Furthermore, Barth's argument that Matthew 28.19 should be understood as a missional rather than a baptismal text also finds support within contemporary New Testament scholarship. The significance of Jesus' baptism by John is further underlined by the fact that Jesus, or at least his disciples, took up the practice of baptism as the Gospel of John relates.

Dunn has argued that Jesus set John's baptism aside and reintroduced it after the resurrection, but his argument is problematic for at least three reasons: i) The Synoptic accounts portray the relationship between John and Jesus as more in continuity than in discontinuity; ii) The literary isolation of Matthew 28.19 makes it difficult to see this event as the institution of Christian baptism; iii) The reason Dunn gives for Jesus' reintroduction of baptism stands in contradiction to the reason that Dunn offers for why Jesus rejected baptism. I suggest that a more likely scenario is that John's baptism continued to be an important part of the Jesus' movement throughout the Galilean ministry. There is no evidence which contradicts this scenario, and the absence of any reference to this within the Synoptic accounts of this ministry accords with their decision not to mention the Jesus pre-Galilean baptismal ministry. This may reflect a concern about a tendency to identify Jesus too closely with John and to confuse them with one another.

The broad agreement among New Testament scholars that Jesus' mission and ministry arose from his hearing and responding to the ministry of John the Baptist lends support to Barth's view that it was his baptism by John which sets in motion and characterizes Jesus' own mission and ministry. Matthew 28 is then best understood as the risen Jesus instructing his disciples to continue this ministry, bringing the good news to the nations. And as he does so, he naturally

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<sup>512</sup>Jesus' instructions to celebrate the Lord's Supper are found in each of the Synoptics (Matt. 26.26-28; Mark 14. 22-24; Luke 22.19-20), as well as in 1 Corinthians 11.23-26.

instructs them to continue the practice that has been the “normal and expected visible form of ‘disciple-making’ throughout Jesus ministry.”<sup>513</sup>

Barth has argued that the silence of the New Testament regarding the basis of Christian baptism is due to the fact that it was a taken-for-granted aspect of the life of the primitive community. That it might be taken-for-granted in this way seems all the more plausible if baptism was practiced seamlessly from the time of John the Baptist, through the ministry of Jesus, and into the life of the community. It must be admitted that Webster’s observation that the New Testament does not refer back to Jesus’ baptism in its discussions of the beginning of the Christian life applies also to the view that Jesus or his disciples baptized throughout his ministry. But, again, the silence applies to both to the positive and to the negative side of this issue: The Synoptics do not deny that Jesus or his disciples baptized, and the Fourth Gospel does not speak of baptism being set aside by Jesus and his followers. Furthermore, the exegetical and historical arguments of this chapter present a coherent and plausible picture that accounts for the data with relative simplicity.<sup>514</sup>

While I am convinced that Jesus or his disciples took up a baptismal ministry in imitation of John, I see this as supplemental rather than essential to the main argument that the John’s baptism and the baptism of Jesus by John form the basis for Christian baptism.<sup>515</sup> The importance of this issue for assessing Barth’s doctrine of baptism is that if Jesus’ baptism by John is the basis of Christian baptism, then it makes sense to turn to these accounts as the

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<sup>513</sup> R.T. France, “Jesus the Baptist?” 109.

<sup>514</sup> Meier concludes his debate with Paul Hollenbach concerning this issue in similar terms: “Needless to say, I cannot prove that Jesus continued baptizing for the whole of his ministry, any more than Hollenbach can prove the opposite. I do think, however, that baptism as one aspect of Jesus’ ministry fits in well with other pieces of data, notably in the Synoptic Gospels, where Jesus’ baptizing activity never appears.” John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Volume Two*, 127. For a helpful discussion of the virtues of completeness and simplicity in historical method, see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 98–104.

<sup>515</sup> In this regard I am sympathetic to Jenson’s concern that “theology should not put too many of the faith’s eggs in a possibly fragile scholarly basket.” Robert W. Jenson, “On Dogmatic/systematic Appropriation of Paul-According-to-Martyn,” in *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology: With and Beyond J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joshua Davis and Douglas Harink (Eugene: Cascade, 2012), 156.

primary Biblical locus for seeking to understand Christian baptism. For some, however, the biggest challenge to Barth's argument is whether or not Barth's view of baptism is compatible with the view of baptism presented elsewhere in the New Testament. The next chapter takes up this question, discussing Barth's treatment of the texts normally appealed to by those advocating a sacramental view of baptism with a view to assessing the plausibility of Barth's exegesis of these passages.

## 5 Barth's Exegetical Answer to the Sacramental Tradition

The more definitely an expositor thinks he has found or not found this or that in a text, the more sharply he should let the question be put to him whether he has not been too clever and found too much, or too obtuse and found too little; whether he has not found what is not there, or perhaps failed to find what is.<sup>516</sup>

Barth acknowledges that in opposing a sacramental interpretation of baptism he opposes “in principle and *ab ovo* an ancient and overwhelmingly strong ecclesiastical and theological tradition.”<sup>517</sup> Recognizing that this tradition “claims to rest on a biblical foundation,” he offers “an exegetical answer to the representatives of this tradition” in an extended exegetical excursus.<sup>518</sup> In this excursus Barth discusses texts which are appealed to in support of a sacramental view of baptism with a view to discovering “whether they perhaps have to be taken sacramentally, whether they might be taken thus, or whether they very definitely cannot be understood in this way.”<sup>519</sup> The present chapter looks more closely at Barth’s arguments in conversation with contemporary New Testament scholars in order to assess the plausibility of Barth’s exegetical answer to the sacramental tradition, but even more to see what answer might now be given to this tradition in support of Barth’s ethical doctrine of baptism.

Barth’s excursus deals with 11 texts which he groups into five types: texts which describe baptism as washing (Acts 22.16; Hebrews 10.22; Ephesians 5.26; Titus 3.5); texts which associate baptism with union with Christ (Galatians 3.27; Romans 6.3-4; Colossians 2.11-12); texts associating baptism with individual regeneration (John 3.5); texts ascribing a saving function to baptism (1 Peter 3.21); texts associating baptism with witness (1 John 5.5-8; John

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<sup>516</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 110.

<sup>517</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 102.

<sup>518</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 107.

<sup>519</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 110.



19.33-37). For reasons of economy and focus this chapter addresses four of these: Ephesians 5.25, Titus 3.5, Galatians 3.27 and Romans 6.4f. These texts were chosen because they are identified by Webster as texts where Barth's exegesis is dogmatically determined and contradicts the "plain sense," and they are (apart from Galatians 3.27) texts for which Yocum provides specific comment. The following discussion demonstrates that a plausible exegetical argument can be made for each of these texts in support of Barth's contention that these passages do not support a sacramental understanding of baptism.

Barth begins his consideration of the Biblical basis for a sacramental understanding of baptism with the linguistic observation that the New Testament does not use the concept of mystery or sacrament to denote baptism. While this does not exclude the possibility that the New Testament might have understood baptism in a way that is subsequently described as sacrament or mystery, it clarifies that applying this terminology to baptism does not arise from New Testament language. To the contrary, Barth observes that the New Testament uses the language of mystery (*μυστήριον*) exclusively to denote divine activity in the world, and that it is never used with reference to human faith, love, hope, the community and its proclamation, nor baptism or the Lord's Supper, as might be expected if the community "had been aware that certain human attitudes, actions and institutions were freighted with the divine word and act."<sup>520</sup>

In addition to this linguistic observation, Barth briefly discusses two general hermeneutical principles. The first of these is *scriptura sui ipsius interpres* (scripture is its own interpreter). He explains that this rule means that "the primary attention of the expositor must be focused on asking how a verse, in its traditional form, is to be understood in terms of itself and its narrower and broader context" while remaining aware of the "conscious or unconscious philosophical or dogmatic presuppositions" which may lead an interpreter to unduly expand or restrict the context

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<sup>520</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 109. Noting that neither human faith or Christian obedience, love, hope, or church, tradition, or baptism are called a mystery in the New Testament, Barth asks: "Would this omission have been possible if the New Testament community had been aware that certain human attitudes, actions and institutions were freighted with the divine word and act, if it had ascribed to baptism in particular the quality of a bearer and mediator of grace, salvation, and its manifestation?" Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 109. As Barth sees it, it was only from the second century onwards that figures such as Justin and Ignatius began to apply the concept of initiatory rites of Hellenistic mystery religions to the action of the Church in baptism and the Lord's supper so these activities came to be patterned after these pagan mysteries, being regarded as "cultic re-presentations of the act and revelation of God in the history of Jesus Christ, and consequently as the granting of a share in his grace."

of interpretation. While not intending to exclude the use of non-biblical parallels or critical emendations or truncations of the text, Barth insists that the central goal of critical work is that the text be “given as much liberty as practicable to say what it has to say.”

Barth’s second hermeneutical principle is the reminder that no exegesis, not even *scripturam per scripturam*, is infallible or completely self-evident. All interpretations are, at best, probabilities and approximations: “Happy is the expositor who can have at least relative certainty at any point!” Barth reminds the reader that there is always the question whether an interpreter “has not been too clever and found too much, or too obtuse and found too little; whether he has not found what is not there, or perhaps failed to find what is.”<sup>521</sup> Rather than implying perpetual uncertainty Barth sees this as an important reminder that forthright proclamation of one’s understanding of scripture ought to be accompanied by modesty and a readiness to “examine his results afresh and to subject them to the scrutiny of others.”<sup>522</sup> With this in view Barth proposes to set his preceding discussion of baptism aside in order to consider the exegetical support of the traditional position, acknowledging that

it might be that there are passages which show that tradition and its consensus are justified - passages with which we have to come to terms, to which we must orientate ourselves at all costs, and in the light of which perhaps have to reassess and correct our conclusions about the basis and goal of baptism, and thus to give to the whole of our baptismal teaching a different understanding. We have thus to ask, with an open mind, whether there are any such statements in the New Testament.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>521</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 110.

<sup>522</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 111.

<sup>523</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 108.

## 5.1 Ephesians 5.26

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word

For Barth, the decisive question concerning Ephesians 5.26 is whether it speaks of two events, the first being Christ's giving himself up for the church and the second being his cleansing the church with the washing of water by the word. If this is the case Barth concedes that this text supports a sacramental view of baptism where "Christ himself is at work, not merely in love and self-offering, but also in baptism, and the cleansing of the community does in fact take place in and with its administration."<sup>524</sup> While acknowledging that this interpretation is not impossible, he argues that the text is better understood as referring to one process, where baptismal washing points to the true washing of the community which took place in Christ's giving up of himself for the community:

The sanctification of the community which took place in the love and self-sacrifice of Jesus is the true cleansing of the community through the washing with water which it has truly undergone, which is the goal of water baptism, which is reflected in its technical administration, but which naturally does not take place in and with this.<sup>525</sup>

In Barth's view, the cleansing which took place on the cross is not silent or remote but "is a living and present word, and *ἐν ῥήματι* it is thus at work among and in them as the divine work which was spoken and which speaks to Christians."<sup>526</sup> Noting that John 15.3 (You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you) is a parallel to such an interpretation, Barth

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<sup>524</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 113.

<sup>525</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 114.

<sup>526</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 114.

concludes: “Not last or least in view of this much more natural and fruitful interpretation of ἐν ῥήματι, a non-sacramental exposition of the passage is ultimately to be preferred.”<sup>527</sup>

Ephesians 5.26 is one of the texts where Barth’s exegesis is criticized. John Webster states that Barth “ignores the plain meaning of the text,” while John Yocum offers the more specific criticism that Barth ignores the force of the instrumental dative τῷ λουτρῷ, asking: “Why does the instrumental role of washing eliminate the force of either ‘the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour,’ or the ‘renewal by the Holy Spirit’?”<sup>528</sup> The implication of these questions being that if we grant that an instrumental role for the washing does not conflict with the goodness of God or the renewal by the Spirit, then a sacramental reading of Ephesians 5.26 is most probable.

While Yocum may have a point with respect to the conceptual compatibility of an instrumental washing and a primary divine causality, the more crucial question with respect to Ephesians 5.26 is whether or not Barth and Yocum are on firm exegetical grounds in understanding the washing as a reference to baptism at all.

Many New Testament scholars view this as a baptismal text but provide relatively little justification for this judgment. For example, Margaret MacDonald states that in Ephesians 5.26 “the preparation of a Jewish woman for marriage by washing with water (Ezek 16.9; cf. Ezek 16.8-14) is juxtaposed with the ritual of baptism (cf. 1 Cor 6.11; Titus 3.5; Heb 10.22).”<sup>529</sup> However, it appears that the only justification for linking Ephesians 5.26 with these other New Testament texts is the language of washing (λουτρῷ) in conjunction with the language of

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<sup>527</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 114.

<sup>528</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 163.

<sup>529</sup>Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 328.

salvation.<sup>530</sup> Furthermore, it is not immediately obvious that the washing referred to in these other texts should be understood as baptism.<sup>531</sup>

Acknowledging that the washing or cleansing of 1 Cor 6.11 may simply be a metaphor for salvation, Andrew Lincoln suggests that it is the fact that Ephesians 5 describes the washing as “with water” that suggests that it is a reference to water baptism.<sup>532</sup> Like MacDonald, Lincoln also identifies an allusion to a Jewish bridal bath in Ephesians 5.26 and suggests that the word *λουτρῶ* (“washing” or “bath”) rather than *βάπτισμα* was used because it is a word that allows for multiple connotations. In light of the broader context, which speaks of Christ’s death as the demonstration of his love for the Church, Lincoln suggests that “the language of ‘the washing with water’ is likely to have as a secondary connotation the notion of the bridal bath,” picking up on Jewish custom and the marital imagery of Ezekiel 16.8-14 and reflecting the view that “baptism is the point at which the Church experiences Christ’s continuing purifying love for her as his bride.”<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>530</sup>In 1 Cor 6.11 washing is associated with being “sanctified” (*ἡγιασθητε*) and “justified” (*ἐδικαιώθητε*); in Titus 3.5 with “regeneration” (*παλιγγενεσίας*) and “renewal” (*ἀνακαινώσεως*); in Heb 10.22 with having hearts sprinkled clean.

<sup>531</sup>John Muddimann also appeal to the occurrence of *λουτρῶ* in Titus 3.5 to argue for a baptismal reference. John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Continuum, 2001), 265. Such an appeal supports a baptismal reference for Ephesians 5.26 only if it can be shown that Titus 3.5 is itself a baptismal text. But, as Harold Hoehner notes, there is nothing in the context of either Ephesians 5.26 or of Titus 3.5 to indicate that *λουτρῶ* refers to baptism. Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 753. See also Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 697. While admitting that it is tempting to understand New Testament references to “washing” in terms of baptism, Dunn notes that “the ritual bath/purification was a deeply rooted tradition within Second Temple Judaism” that was often used metaphorically. In view of the debates concerning ritual purity and clean/unclean, Dunn suggests that in 1 Cor. 6.11 “it is all the less likely that Paul and his readers would hear the metaphor of washing as a reference to an actual washing, any more than they would hear talk of being ‘sanctified’ as a reference to being set apart for service in the Jerusalem temple, any more than they would hear talk of being ‘justified’ as a reference to a ruling literally pronounced in a law court.” James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 300–01.

<sup>532</sup>Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1991), 375. Fergusson, however, insists that 1 Cor 6.11 is an allusion for baptism, arguing that the fact that the only other occurrence of *ἀπολούω* is Acts 22.16 where it is explicitly associated with baptism confirms this. Fergusson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 150.

<sup>533</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 375. See also Muddiman, *Ephesians*, 265. Peter O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 420.

But is the allusion to a bridal bath only a secondary connotation? Given the immediate context, which speaks of Christ's love and self-giving for the Church as exemplary for husbands loving their wives, it seems more likely that the bridal bath imagery is primary and any allusion to baptism is at most secondary. Rather than being a text which speaks about baptism in terms of a marriage analogy, baptism being described as "the point at which the Church experiences Christ's continuing purifying love for her as his bride,"<sup>534</sup> Ephesians 5.26 is better understood as a text which speaks about Christ's self-giving love for the church, the cross being the point at which Christ enacted his purifying love for the Church as his bride.

One of the strongest proponents of understanding a marriage analogy as providing the primary context for understanding Ephesians 5.25-27 is Markus Barth. He notes that Ephesians 5.25f, like a number of other texts in the New Testament which speak of "washing" or a "bath," is identified as a baptismal text only by conjecture, observing that "while the conjecture may be justified in several cases, it is still not a foolproof demonstration that in early Christian congregations the metaphorical sense of 'bath' and 'washing' was always 'baptism'."<sup>535</sup> Similarly, referring also to 1 Cor 6.11, Titus 3.5 and Hebrews 10.22, Harold Hoehner observes that "none of these passages have any suggestion of a sacramental setting" nor have they any association with a baptismal formula such as "in the name of Jesus" or "in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit."<sup>536</sup> There are simply no clues in the immediate context that would suggest identifying the washing of Ephesians 5.26 with baptism.

Nor are there difficulties in understanding the passage that a baptismal reference solves. In particular, understanding the washing of Ephesians 5.26 in terms of marital imagery proves a plausible explanation for how *ἐν ῥήματι* (through/by a word) might be understood. The cross is not only a cleansing but is also a word of love by which Christ binds the church to himself:

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<sup>534</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 375.

<sup>535</sup>Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, 697. In addition to the context, another factor that points away from a baptismal reference is the fact that in Ephesians 5.26 it is the church, as a body, that is washed. See Peter O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 422. See also Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 754.

<sup>536</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 754. Peter O'Brien makes a similar argument, observing that the only mention of baptism in Ephesians "is at 4.5, where it is listed in a sevenfold confession but is not specifically emphasized." Peter O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 422.

When he declares his love in words, he does more than offer an opinion: he gives his word to his chosen one, much as Yahweh ‘plighted his troth’ to Jerusalem (Ezek 16.8).... It is probable that vs. 26 describes the Messiah as the Bridegroom who says this decisive ‘word’ to his Bride and thereby privately and publicly, decently and legally binds himself to her and her to him. As stated earlier, the covenant formula, ‘I will be your God, you shall be my people,’ is the closest parallel. Romantic literature abounds with references to similar formulations that are exchanged between lovers.<sup>537</sup>

On this understanding, Christ’s giving of himself for the church was his setting her apart to be his own, his sanctifying her; it was his cleansing her; it was his binding the church to himself through the word.<sup>538</sup> Such an interpretation of Ephesians 5.26 fits nicely with the surrounding context, speaking as it does of Christ’s love and self-giving for the Church being exemplary for husbands loving their wives.

In view of this, Yocum’s suggestion that an instrumental understanding of baptismal washing is compatible with the goodness of God and the renewal by the Holy Spirit is beside the point. The

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<sup>537</sup>Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, 691. M. Barth argues that it should be translated “his word”: “On the basis of this exposition of *rhema* in Eph 5.26, it is appropriate to add in the English translation a possessive pronoun which is not found in the Greek original: the Messiah makes the church holy by ‘his’ word. The origin, weight, truth, and price of this word are described in 5:25: because the Messiah ‘has given himself’ for the church, the ‘word’ is valid by which he binds himself to her and her to him.”

<sup>538</sup>O’Brien follows Markus Barth on this point. See Peter O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 423. Where M. Barth would differ with O’Brien is that, on Barth’s view, the “cleansing by the washing with water/made clean by the bath in water” is a metaphorical reference to baptism by the Holy Spirit. Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, 696. He supports this perspective by appealing to the book of Hebrews. Noting that in Ezekiel 36.25-27 being “sprinkled clean with pure water” is a metaphor for receiving a spiritual cleansing, for receiving a new heart and spirit, Barth suggests that the argument of Hebrews as a whole is that the OT ablutions with water are “replaced by ‘the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself... to purify the conscience. A true heart in full assurance of faith ... sprinkled clean from an evil conscience’ and a body ‘washed with pure water,’ are characteristic of the worship proper to the New covenant.” Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, 692. Furthermore, he notes that the language of “sanctification” (*ἀγίαση*) is compatible with a marital context: “This notion of setting apart as one’s own is precisely what one does in marriage, and thus fits the imagery of Ezekiel 16.” Peter O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 421.

more fundamental question is whether the washing is a reference to baptism at all.<sup>539</sup> Absent any other evidence pointing to water-baptism in this passage from Ephesians, the specification that the washing is “with water” seems an insufficient basis to argue that the washing refers to baptism.

## 5.2 Titus 3.5

He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Barth begins his discussion of Titus 3.5 by noting that the point of this passage is to show that the admonition that Christians be ready for every good work and that they exercise themselves in good works (3.1, 8) is not asking the impossible. Christians have been saved and are no longer under the regime of ignorance, disobedience, error, unbridled desires and hatred (v.3): They have been “set in the position of people who are capable of such works.”<sup>540</sup> And Titus 3.5-6 states that God did this *διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου, οὗ ἐξέχεεν ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς πλουσίως διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν* (through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour).<sup>541</sup> As with Ephesians 5.26, a sacramental interpretation of this text understands *λουτροῦ* to refer to the act of baptism, and understands it instrumentally and causatively: “The baptism administered to them is the means by which persons are set in this new standing, by which they become Christians.”<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>539</sup>Thus, while I agree with Fowler that “if this reference points to baptism, but without implying a sacramental significance, then the language of the text can only be called confusing,” I disagree with the premise that the reference points to baptism. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol*, 183.

<sup>540</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 114.

<sup>541</sup>Barth gives the text as *διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως τοῦ πνεύματος*, perhaps reflecting a slightly different textual tradition. The difference is immaterial for the purpose of the present argument.

<sup>542</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 114.



Barth argues, however, that a sacramental understanding of *λουτροῦ* in Titus 3.5 creates significant difficulties. First, there is the difficulty involved in understanding “this many-sided and materially heavily freighted passage solely in the light of the two words *διὰ λουτροῦ*, i.e., in the light of these two words as the point of the whole.”<sup>543</sup> Furthermore, such an interpretation must then “justify materially the orientation of the whole statement to this single point, showing that the aim of the epiphany of the Saviour God is to save...certain men, not by works required of them and performed by them, in virtue of his mercy alone, but through the fact that they have themselves baptized and are baptized.”<sup>544</sup> Thirdly, a sacramental interpretation of this passage involves the assumption that there are two cleansing: In the first place, Jesus Christ purifies for himself a people through his self-sacrifice (Titus 2.14), and then there is also “a second and different cleansing, which is in practice decisive, namely, that effected in baptism as that ‘washing’.” Furthermore, sacramental interpreters of this passage must “give to *παλιγγενεσίας*, not the sense which it has in the only other instance in the New Testament (Mt 19.28), namely, the universal restoration or new creation of the world, but a meaning which is abstracted from Jn. 3.3f., namely, that of the individual new birth of specific individuals.” And finally, Barth argues that sacramental interpreters of this passage must “assume that in this passage... renewing with the Holy Spirit is identical and coincident with the act of baptism” in spite of the distinction between these two in the Gospels and in Acts. Barth concludes: “Those who feel that these difficulties are too heavy must question whether *διὰ λουτροῦ* means ‘by baptism’.”<sup>545</sup>

In the face of these five difficulties, Barth suggests that Old Testament language which associates cleansing with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit lies behind Titus 3.5, baptism being only a secondary allusion:

In agreement with Tit. 2.14 the cleansing bath in which Christians have their origin, described also at Tit 3.5 in the language of Ezek. 36.25; Is. 44.3; Zech 13.1, is the purifying and renewing

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<sup>543</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 114.

<sup>544</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 115.

<sup>545</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 115.

outpouring of the Holy Spirit which has taken place on the basis of the new creation ushered in by the Saviour God in the history of Jesus Christ.... The probable allusion to baptism in the two words *διὰ λουτροῦ* consists once again, therefore, in a supplementary reminiscence. Having begun by submitting yourselves to the washing of baptism, you have recognized and confirmed for yourselves the renewal of the world which has taken place in Jesus Christ and which has led to your personal cleansing in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is thus legitimate and necessary to address you on the basis of this new position.<sup>546</sup>

According to Barth, a sacramental interpretation of this passage “is ruled out almost completely.”<sup>547</sup>

Both Webster and Yocum take Barth to task for his interpretation of Titus 3.5, Webster again claiming that Barth ignores the plain meaning of the text, and Yocum again arguing that he refuses to consider an instrumental role for baptism as a washing. Responding to Barth’s insistence that in light of Titus 2.14 it is Christ’s sacrifice rather than baptism that is decisive, Yocum states that “Barth assumes an either-or choice here that corresponds to his own interpretive framework. It would seem legitimate for one who takes the instrumental interpretation to ask in reply why one has to make baptism and Christ’s sacrifice rivals?”<sup>548</sup> While Yocum may have a legitimate point here, as with Ephesians 5.26 the crucial question is whether Titus 3.5 should be considered a baptismal text in the first place.

Many New Testament scholars maintain the traditional view that in Titus 3.5 *διὰ λουτροῦ* is a reference to baptism. We have already seen Margaret MacDonald and others appeal to Titus 3.5 as a reference to baptism in order to argue that the *λουτροῦ* of Ephesians 5.26 is also a baptismal reference. Other New Testament scholars support MacDonald’s view: For example, Raymond

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<sup>546</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 115.

<sup>547</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 115.

<sup>548</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 163–64.

Collins states that Titus 3.5 incorporates “a traditional baptismal hymn that speaks of the Christian ritual as one of rebirth and renewal.”<sup>549</sup> Noting that the author of Titus qualifies the hymn as “a trustworthy saying,” Collins suggests that “the hymn contains one of the most important statements on the nature of baptism to be found in the New Testament (see Rom. 6.3-11).”<sup>550</sup> He explains that the dominant theme of the hymn “is salvation, effected by Jesus Christ and imparted to Christians in the baptismal ritual. The ritual enables the baptized to be heirs, hoping for eternal life.”<sup>551</sup>

However, as with Ephesians 5 we must ask the basis for understanding the word *λουτροῦ* as a reference to baptism. After all, baptism is not explicitly mentioned in Titus 3, nor in the letter as a whole. While it could be used as a metaphor for baptism, William Mounce points out that “*λουτροῦ*, ‘cleansing,’ is used many times of ceremonial cleansing with no thought of the baptismal ritual.”<sup>552</sup>

If Titus 3.5 is drawn from a baptismal ritual that was familiar to both author and recipient then perhaps an overt mention of baptism was not necessary. It is far from clear, however, that this is the case. While Collins states that the vocabulary and rhythm indicate that Titus 3.5 was part of a preexistent unit, Jerome Quinn argues that if there is a baptismal hymn lying behind this passage it has “been freely reshaped.” While admitting that “the first-person plural designating the congregation is notable, as well as the third-person singular aorists leading into a purposive clause and the chain of anarthrous genitives in v.5,” Quinn points that other indications of a hymnic or liturgical structure are missing: “There is no introductory formula, no word of praise

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<sup>549</sup>Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 360.

<sup>550</sup>Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, 360.

<sup>551</sup>Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, 360.

<sup>552</sup>William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 448. See also Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 439. Fergusson rejects the suggestion that the washing in Titus 3.5 is figurative way of speaking of cleansing by the Spirit, noting that “such a usage would be unprecedented,” and that “the theological ideas of the passage are elsewhere associated with baptism.” Fergusson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 163. To the contrary, the usage here is not unique if, as I argue in the Appendix, Hebrews 10.22 similarly speaks of the cleansing by the Spirit in terms of a washing.

or thanks for the God who is explicitly named, no regular pattern of syllables or accents per stich, a soft parallelism between the stichs, and no obvious chiasmic features, ‘ring-compositions,’ or the like.”<sup>553</sup> And while Collins asserts that the distinct vocabulary (“washing,” “rebirth,” “renewal,” “pour,” “profusely,” “heir” all being found only in Titus among the Pastoral epistles) are “compelling evidence of the borrowed nature of the hymn,” Mounce argues that the language and structure of the passage show “it to be nonhymnic, credal at best, and very typically Pauline.”<sup>554</sup>

The fact that Titus 3.5 speaks of a *λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας* (washing of regeneration) has also been appealed to in support of a baptismal reference for this text. Noting that *παλιγγενεσίας* also appears in Matthew 19.28, Collins explains that it was a Hellenistic word for a range of experiences and suggests that it be understood in light of John 3.3-8, the discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus about being “born again” (*γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν*). While the Johannine passage does not use the word “rebirth” (*παλιγγενεσίας*), Collins draws a connection between it and Titus 3.5 on the basis of the Johannine passage speaking about a birth that takes place in water and the Spirit (*γεννηθῆ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος*): “The substantive similarities between the Johannine text and 3.5d-e - the references to washing, new birth and the Spirit - suggest that both of these

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<sup>553</sup>Jerome D. Quinn, *The Letter to Titus: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary and an Introduction to Titus, I and II Timothy, the Pastoral Epistles*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 211.

<sup>554</sup>Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 441. Mounce presents a thorough discussion of whether the passage is a pre-existing creed or a Pauline composition, drawing on the work of Gordon Fee. Furthermore, Mounce suggests that Hanson “may be correct in seeing the [concluding] formula only as a means of adding solemnity to what the author is saying. See Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 778–79. I. Howard Marshall similarly notes that Titus 3.5 lacks any of the poetic elements that would suggest it is a hymn. He admits that it probably includes traditional material, but suggest that “the writer has so adapted it to his own purposes here that the task of identifying a traditional basis will be fruitless.” I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 307. Ben Witherington notes that “it is possible... that Paul is citing a portion of a traditional credal formula here, but since it lacks any of the poetic form that characterizes early Christian hymns, a credal fragment rather than a hymn fragment is the more likely of the two possibilities.” Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Volume 1. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1–2 Timothy and 1–3 John* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 158.

late first-century texts describe the ritual of Christian baptism as bringing about a new life through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>555</sup>

Quite apart from the question of whether John 3.5 is itself a baptismal text,<sup>556</sup> there are a number of difficulties with the parallels that Collins identifies between Titus 3 and John 3. There continues to be some uncertainty as to the use meaning of *παλιγγενεσία*, and so of the similarity between this concept and the *γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν* of John 3.<sup>557</sup> Furthermore, where Titus 3.5 speaks of a washing, John 3 speaks of a *birth* by water and Spirit. There is no indication in John 3 that either the water or the Spirit should be associated with washing, and it is entirely possible that the medium of cleansing in Titus 3 is the Spirit that has been poured out. Philip Towner takes this view, arguing that “of the Holy Spirit” indicates the agent of the washing: “If one complex event is in mind, then the final genitive phrase, ‘of (or by) the Holy Spirit,’ despite its location at the end of the phrase, is best understood as attributing this ‘washing’ by which people are saved to the agency of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>558</sup> Thus, the “washing” of Titus 3.5 “falls into the metaphorical sphere, with the image of washing referring to a spiritual cleansing.”<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>555</sup>Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, 365.

<sup>556</sup>For a brief discussion of this question, see the appendix.

<sup>557</sup>While there has been a debate concerning the use of term *παλιγγενεσία* in mystery religions, Towner notes that “as a background either to this term or to the practice of baptism in the early church, this particular explanation has been laid to rest.” Towner’s view is that “the idea of new birth associated with conversion (symbolized in baptism?) gives the best sense, and the term’s widespread use made it adaptable as a metaphor for Christian new birth.” Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 782. Marshall concludes similarly, noting that the concept of new birth was already associated with baptism and conversion. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 319–20. Quinn, on the other hand, argues that the conceptual background of *παλιγγενεσία* was Jewish apocalyptic hope for the renewal of creation, and that Christians retained this apocalyptic sense, using the term to articulate their hope in bodily resurrection. Quinn, *Titus*, 220–23. See also Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 448–49. Peter Leithart argues that the portrayal of baptism in Hebrews 10.22 indicates that baptism was understood to have cosmic connotations that are consonant with the use of the term *παλιγγενεσία* in Titus 3.5. See Peter J. Leithart, “Womb of the World: Baptism and the Priesthood of the New Covenant in Hebrews 10.19–22,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 78 (2000): 49–65. Leithart’s argument concerning Heb 10.22 is taken up in the Appendix.

<sup>558</sup>Towner notes that the syntax of the prepositional phrase *διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου* is ambiguous: “We may think that we know what this means as we read it in English, for we make various connections and insert commas according to our theological upbringing. How much goes with the first preposition, ‘through’? Does the process of

Where Collins sees similarities between the language of Titus 3.5 and John 3.5 pointing towards a common baptismal background for the two texts, Towner roots Titus 3.5 in the language of the Old Testament. Having observed that the language of “purifying a people that are his very own” in Titus 2.14 echoes the language of Ezekiel 36 and 37,<sup>560</sup> he argues that the washing of the Holy Spirit in Titus 3.5 would similarly call to mind the promises of these texts from Ezekiel:

The epicenter of that network of texts is the promise of renewal by the “in-giving” of the Spirit (36.27). Given the potency of the Spirit-tradition and some verbal and conceptual cues, this language (“the washing of regeneration,” “renewal by the Holy Spirit”) would call to mind the vivid images of the Spirit-promise in Ezekiel 36.25-27 - which included the imagery of sprinkling with water,

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‘washing’ produce both ‘rebirth’ and ‘renewal’, or is the latter linked only to the following Holy Spirit? Everything depends on where one makes the break.” He argues that the conceptual similarity between *παλιγγενεσίας* (rebirth) and *ἀνακαινώσεως* (renewal) suggest unity, and the fact that both rebirth and renewal are governed by the single preposition *διὰ* suggests that “the most likely intention of the phrase is... to view a single event from two slightly different, yet interrelated, perspectives.” Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 783. Similarly, Mounce notes that the *καὶ* linking *παλιγγενεσίας* and *ἀνακαινώσεως* may be exegetical but suggests that it is better to see it as copulative, linking two aspects of the one event of conversion, such that in conversion “the Holy Spirit both cleanses believers through regeneration and fills them by renewing, forming them into a new creature.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 448. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 168. For a thorough discussion of the syntax of this phrase, see Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 316–17.

<sup>559</sup>Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 778. Towner earlier made this argument in Philip H. Towner, *The Goal of Our Instruction: The Structure of Theology and Ethics in the Pastoral Epistles* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 116. Others who interpret the “washing” of Titus 3.5 as a metaphor for spiritual cleansing include Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 780f; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 195–202; James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 168f; Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 318. George W. Knight III argues that the use of *λουτροῦ* rather than *βαπτισμα* points in this direction.” George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 350. Ben Witherington suggests that the use of *λουτροῦ* in Titus 3.5 “can be fruitfully compared with Ephesians 5.25-27, where the washing takes place by means of the Word, again not by means of the baptismal act of immersion.” Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies*, 158.

<sup>560</sup>Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 761–63.

renewal of the heart, and the gift of the Spirit - and other Spirit texts (cf. LXX Ps 103.50).<sup>561</sup>

This echoing of Old Testament language of the giving of the Spirit continues in Titus 3.6 which itself echoes Joel 3.1 when it speaks of the Spirit having been poured out generously. And here there is a natural link with the event of Pentecost, an event which had no connection with water-baptism.<sup>562</sup> Thus, while the use of a metaphor of washing to describe the Spirit's work may have brought baptism to mind for the recipients of Titus, this was probably a secondary rather than a primary reference. As Marshall observes:

While the rite of water baptism may not be far from mind (as a symbolic expression depicting the work of the Spirit), it is that which it signifies - the individual's experience of the Spirit - that is the primary focal point, and this is probably linked with the paradigmatic experience of the church at Pentecost (v.6, ἐκχέω). Nevertheless, while the rite of baptism might celebrate, illustrate or commemorate the work of the Spirit and therefore be immediately called to mind or alluded to by such a statement (here and throughout the NT; cf. Kelly, 252), this is not a proof-text for

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<sup>561</sup>Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 784.

<sup>562</sup>Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 784–85. Noting that the verb ἐκχέειν (poured out) is used of the Spirit in Zech 12.10; Acts 2.17, 18 (=Joel 3.1,2), 33; 10.45, Marshall observes that “the verbal link thus provided with Acts 2 suggests an allusion to the Pentecost event of the Spirit's outpouring upon God's people.” Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 322. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 165–70; Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 755–95; Towner, *The Goal of Our Instruction*, 112–18; Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies*, 159. While Quinn notes the terminological coincidences with Ezekiel 39.29 and Joel 2.23–24 and mentions Acts 2 as representing an apostolic interpretation of these texts, he does not comment on the significance of this for understanding Titus 3.5.2. Quinn, *Titus*, 225. Collins, on the other hand, makes no mention of Acts 2, but connects the language of the Spirit profusely poured out with Johannine literature, which he notes especially emphasizes “the lavishness of this water gift and its relevance to eternal life (see John 4.14–15).” Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, 366. See the discussion of Acts 2 in chapter 3 above.

baptismal regeneration or sacramental salvation (*contra* Schlarb 1990:189).<sup>563</sup>

In conclusion, while many New Testament scholars support a traditional interpretation of Titus 3.5 as a reference to baptism, their arguments in favour of this view are less than compelling. On the other hand, the language of the outpoured Spirit in Titus 3.6 speaks strongly in favour of an understanding of the “cleansing” of 3.5 as a cleansing accomplished by the gift of the Spirit without reference to whether or not this took place in connection with the rite of baptism. Where Webster suggests that Barth ignores the “plain meaning” of the text, we might respond with the words of William Mounce: “to interpret *διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας*, ‘by the washing of regeneration,’ as the inner cleansing effected in conversion is a plausible and natural reading of the text.”<sup>564</sup>

### 5.3 Galatians 3.27

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ

Unlike the texts which speak of washing, Barth notes that Galatians 3.27 clearly and unequivocally refers to baptism through the word *ἐβαπτίσθητε*. According to Barth, this text reminds the Galatians that their freedom is grounded “not only in their faith, but ontically”: “On the basis of a specific happening they are the children of God, they are all one as those who belong to Christ - not Hellenes as distinct from Jews, under no obligation to become Jews first, just as slaves do not have to become free or men women or *vice versa*.”<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>563</sup>Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 322.

<sup>564</sup>Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 439–40. While Fowler successfully identifies weaknesses with some aspects of Barth’s argument, his discussion does not address the issues raised in the above discussion of Titus 3.5. For a rebuttal of Fowler’s claim that the Gospels and Acts point to a “normative... connection between water and the Spirit” with respect to baptism, see the discussion of chapter 3. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol*, 184–85.

<sup>565</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 116.



Barth argues, however, that “the narrower and broader context, and indeed the whole thesis of Galatians, make it highly unlikely” that the act of baptism is the event of ontic renewing. Noting that there is no mention of baptism in Galatians apart from 3.27, Barth suggests that if Paul understood baptism to be the event of initiation into salvation, effectively replacing circumcision, one would have expected him to mention it elsewhere in the epistle. If Paul understood baptism as the event of initiation into salvation, why would he have stated or merely hinted at this in a single sentence, and how Paul could have refrained “from dealing plainly and explicitly with baptism in the basic passage Gal. 2.11ff.?”<sup>566</sup>

Instead, Barth argues that a person’s renewal is effected objectively and subjectively by the Holy Spirit: that in Galatians more broadly

the divine act and revelation in Jesus Christ, faith in him, and the work of the Holy Ghost are specified and described as that initiation and beginning, as the one great renewal of man’s being, and hence as the effective abrogation of the Mosaic Law. There is no more place in Galatians than there is in Hebrews for any other alongside it as the condition of its subjective actualisation.<sup>567</sup>

Galatians 3.27, then, is a reminder to the Galatians that in being baptized they have concretely confessed and committed themselves to their new identity as those who have received the Spirit and been clothed with Christ: “They had themselves baptized into Christ (*εἰς Χριστόν*) when, along with those who baptized them, they could see and confess that they were persons clothed upon with Christ, renewed and liberated in him.”<sup>568</sup>

Departing from the approach of the previous sections of this chapter, the following discussion of Galatians 3.27 takes place primarily in dialogue with a single New Testament scholar, J.L. Martyn. Martyn is an interesting and important dialogue partner whose “apocalyptic” reading of

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<sup>566</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 116.

<sup>567</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 116.

<sup>568</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 116.

Galatians has an affinity with Barth's theology and yet who appears to advance a sacramental view of baptism in Galatians 3.27.<sup>569</sup> However, Martyn's broader discussion of Galatians stands in tension with his sacramental description of baptism, and his apocalyptic reading of Galatians supports Barth's rejection of Galatians 3.27 as a text which supports a sacramental view of baptism.<sup>570</sup>

Martyn argues that in Galatians 3.26-28 Paul is drawing upon a pre-existing baptismal tradition in order to reinforce his argument that Gentiles do not need to become Jews prior to becoming included in the messianic community as children of God: A person becomes a child of God not by becoming a child of Abraham, but "by being incorporated into God's son" where there is no Jew or Gentile.<sup>571</sup> And this incorporation into Christ takes place in the event of baptism: By being baptized the Galatians were incorporated into Christ, being taken into a "realm of redemptive power" in which they became children of God.<sup>572</sup> The new robe which the baptizand

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<sup>569</sup>For Martyn's view of apocalyptic, see J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 37.

<sup>570</sup>While I will treat this text as a reference to water-baptism, Dunn makes a good case for understanding baptism to refer metaphorically to the Christian's reception of the Spirit by which they are "immersed" in Christ. Commenting on Galatians 3.27, Dunn suggests that, just as the language of "clothing oneself with Christ" is metaphorical, so the language of being "baptized into Christ" may be metaphorical, being "modelled originally on the Baptist's metaphor of the Coming One's action of baptizing in Spirit and fire (Mark i.8 pars), as adapted by Jesus himself in referring it to his death (Mark 10.38-39 pars) and taken up again more in its original form by the first Christians including Paul (Acts i.5; xi.16; 1 Cor. xii.13)." James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 203. See Dunn's argument for a metaphorical interpretation of the baptismal language of Galatians 3.27 in James D. G. Dunn, "'Baptized' as Metaphor". Fergusson counters Dunn's suggestion, arguing that "although the verb 'baptize' can have a metaphorical use, the context usually gives a clear indication of this. Without such an indication, the ordinary use of the word at the time in Jewish and Christian circles for the religious immersion of a person in water should be assumed." Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 148.

<sup>571</sup>Ferguson notes that "the declaration 'no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free' (without 'male and female') occurs in a baptismal context also in 1 Corinthians 12.13 and Colossians 3.11 (cf. Acts 2.39) and so may represent an affirmation in the baptismal service." Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 147. There is a circularity to Ferguson's argument however, in that when he discusses the question of whether 1 Corinthians 12.13 is itself a baptismal text, he refers to the fact that "the phrase 'neither Jews nor Greeks, slaves nor free' elsewhere is in a literal baptismal context (Gal. 3.28; Col 3.11)." Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 153.

<sup>572</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 375.

puts on as they come out of the water “signifies Christ himself,” for Christ “is the ‘place’ in which the baptized now find their corporate life.”<sup>573</sup> Martyn describes baptism in “sacramental” terms, not simply as “a cultic act that merely replaces circumcision as the rite of entry” into the people of God, but as a divine event, an apocalyptic event in the life of the one baptized:

Standing in the waters of death (Rom 6:3-4) and stripped of their old identity, they become God’s own sons, putting on Christ, God’s Son (2:20), as though he were their clothing, thus acquiring a new identity that lies beyond ethnic, social, and sexual distinctions. In a word, the Galatians become one new person by being united in Christ himself.<sup>574</sup>

Thus, to be baptized into Christ is to be crucified with Christ, having died to the old cosmos with its structures of Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, and have entered God’s new creation.<sup>575</sup>

There is a tension, however, between this sacramental account of baptism and Martyn’s earlier description of the beginning of faith.<sup>576</sup> This tension is hinted at in Martyn’s suggestion that Paul

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<sup>573</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 376.

<sup>574</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 374. Martyn notes that Paul’s emphasis is less on baptism as a cleansing bath than on baptism as equipping for participation in apocalyptic warfare. It is “the juncture at which the person both participates in the death of Christ (Rom 6.4) and is equipped with the armor for apocalyptic battle (1 Thess 5.8-10; 1 Cor 15.53-54; Rom 13.12).” Martyn, *Galatians*, 376.

<sup>575</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 376. Furthermore, in the context of his comments on Galatians 3.14 Martyn suggests that Paul understood the Galatians to have come to participate in the crucifixion of Christ at their baptism: “The Spirit came to them not via the Law, but rather in Jesus Christ. In the present sentence that means specifically and emphatically in the Christ who was crucified and in whose crucifixion the Galatians themselves participated at their baptism (2.19; 3.27).” Martyn, *Galatians*, 322.

<sup>576</sup>Some have suggested that there is an inherent tension, even contradiction, between the Pauline understanding of justification by faith and the account of baptism found in Galatians 3.27. For example, John Bligh affirms Albert Schweitzer’s view that “St Paul found the sacrament of Baptism in existence, instituted by Christ, and knew that the other apostles attributed to the rite of Baptism exactly what, in his own theology, was effected by faith; he therefore attributed justification both to faith and to Baptism without stopping to relate the one to the other.” John Bligh, *Galatians. A Discussion of St. Paul’s Epistle* (London: St Paul Publications, 1969), 324. See Albert Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters: A Critical History*, trans. W. Montgomery (London: A. & C. Black, 1948), 214–15. While Bligh’s view is overly influenced by an unnuanced view of Pauline Christianity as a

inserted *διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ* (through the faith that is in Christ Jesus) into the baptismal tradition which he received, and that he did so in order to remind the Galatians “that in their baptism they were taken into the realm of the Christ whose faith had elicited their own faith.”<sup>577</sup> For Martyn, as for Barth, the faith by virtue of which a person might request baptism is itself the result of the work of the Spirit of God in that person’s life: “For Paul faith does not lie in the realm of human possibility.... when Paul speaks about placing one’s trust in Christ, he is pointing to a deed that reflects not the freedom of the will but God’s freeing of the will.”<sup>578</sup>

This statement reflects Martyn’s apocalyptic understanding of Paul’s letter to the Galatians more broadly. He understands the focus of Galatians to be the divine act and revelation in Jesus Christ. Galatians is not the presentation of a religious option which the Galatians might choose over another religious option, but is instead “an announcement designed to wake the Galatians up to the real cosmos,” a cosmos that has been invaded by God in Christ:<sup>579</sup>

In Christ, the Son of God whose faith is engagingly enacted in his death, God invaded the human orb and commenced a battle for the liberation of the human will itself. And in the case of believers,

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“religion which is beyond law,” the pendulum threatens to swing too far the other way when Lars Hartman states that in Galatians 3.27 “Paul explains what he says about faith with a statement on baptism.” Hartman, *Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*, 55. Hartman provides no account of the relationship between his understanding of Galatians 3.27 and Paul’s broader argument concerning justification by faith, nor how his understanding of baptism as a rite of initiation can be reconciled with Paul’s critique of circumcision in Galatians. As Barth notes, if Paul understood baptism as a Christian replacement for circumcision, it is hard to see why he would have not said more about it in the course of the argument of Galatians.

<sup>577</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 375.

<sup>578</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 276?

<sup>579</sup>See Martyn’s comments that Galatians is more revelatory and performative than horatory and persuasive, as well as his distinction between antinomy and antithesis, announcement and argument. Martyn argues that Paul’s advocates a cosmological apocalyptic eschatology as opposed to the forensic apocalyptic eschatology of the teachers. Martyn, *Galatians*, 23, 37, 99. See also Martyn, *Galatians*, 37, 99.

that apocalyptic invasion is the mysterious genesis of faith in Christ (cf. Phil 2.12-13; Gal 4.4, 6).<sup>580</sup>

Furthermore, it is through the effective proclamation of the gospel that God's invasion of the cosmos becomes a reality in the life of an individual. Martyn explains that when Paul preached the gospel "he was confident that in this preaching God was immediately active, eliciting the hearers' faith and sending the Spirit of Christ into their hearts."<sup>581</sup> Martyn's understanding of the coming of the Spirit in gospel proclamation is what Barth calls baptism with the Spirit. In his comments on Galatians 3.2 Martyn links Galatians 4.6 with 3.2, thereby identifying the reception of the Spirit in gospel proclamation with the Spirit's invasion of the heart:

Using a locution widely employed among early Christians to refer to the inception of Christian life ('to receive the Holy Spirit,' e.g., Acts 2.38, John 20.22), Paul speaks of something that happens to human beings. God causes the Spirit of the Son to invade their hearts (4.6). In the lives of the Galatians things began to be the way they really are *when Paul preached* Christ crucified to them and when the Spirit came upon them (cf. 3.14).<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>580</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 276. Martyn's discussion of Paul's view of faith and human freedom implies that the beginning of human faithfulness does not lie in a person's decision to be baptised or in the event of their baptism, but rather in the divine change which God brings about, and by virtue of which they request and receive baptism: "When we trust God, Paul would say, we signal that we ourselves have been invaded by God's presuppositionless grace, and we confess that the locus of God's invasion is *especially* our will! Far from presupposing freedom of the will (cf. Hos. 5.4), Paul speaks of the freeing of the will for the glad service of God and neighbour." Martyn, *Galatians*, 271 n.173. The faith by virtue of which a person requests and receives baptism from the community is the fruit of God's Spirit at work; it is not the beginning of the Christian life but is rather a further step along the way which begins with God's apocalyptic invasion of the human will.

<sup>581</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 116. Martyn explains that, for Paul, gospel proclamation is an event which is empowered by the Spirit, and through which Christ invades the hearts of the hearers; it is an event in which "God himself steps on the scene, addressing the hearers directly... speaking his own word-event." Martyn, *Galatians*, 131. It is God's being "the *immediate* author of the gospel-event that creates the distinction of gospel from tradition." Martyn, *Galatians*, 115.

<sup>582</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 284. Emphasis added. Joseph Mangina has recently argued that Martyn's "apocalyptic realism [is] compatible with a sacramental realism," baptism being the occasion when "the new creation irrupts into the midst of our solemn assemblies." Joseph Mangina, *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology: With and Beyond J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joshua B. Davis

It is as the gospel is proclaimed that God causes the Spirit of his Son to invade their hearts, freeing their enslaved wills for obedience. This is the beginning of the Christian life:

The beginning of the Galatians's life as members of the church was not the result of a human act of deciding for the Spirit rather than for the Flesh. At the beginning lay God's act of sending the Spirit into their hearts, begetting them by the power of the Spirit (4.6), and freeing their enslaved wills for obedience to him in the Spirit (4.6). In their baptism the Galatians crucified the Flesh (5.24), but they did that under the direction of the Spirit, just as their cry to God as Father was in fact the deed of the Spirit.<sup>583</sup>

The faith by virtue of which a person requests and receives baptism from the community is the fruit of the Spirit's work. As such, water-baptism is not the origin or basis of the Christian life but is rather a fruit of God's act of begetting a person by the power of the Spirit. It is only because they have already been begotten by God by the power of the Spirit that they cry out to God as Father and crucify the flesh in baptism.

This view stands in tension with Martyn's description of baptism as the event in which a person acquires a new identity, being incorporated into Christ, becoming a child of God, participating in

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and Douglas Harink (Eugene: Cascade, 2012), 326. The tension I have identified is between both Mangina and Martyn and Galatians 3.1-5 which, by Martyn's own account, speaks of the proclamation of Christ crucified as the event in conjunction with which the Spirit irrupted into the lives of the Galatians. This need not imply that proclamation replaces baptism as a sacrament in the sense of being a human activity in and through which the living Jesus Christ baptizes with the Spirit. But if there is such a sacramental event, I suggest that Martyn's reading of Galatians points to proclamation as being that event. I take up the question of in what sense baptism with the Spirit need be understood as a punctiliar, temporal event in my conclusion below.

<sup>583</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 534. According to Martyn, for Paul "the locus of God's invasion is *especially* our will." Martyn, *Galatians*, 271 n.173.

the death of Christ.<sup>584</sup> One way to resolve this tension would be to understand God's apocalyptic invasion of a person as a two-step process. This is a possible reading of the following:

In the crucified Christ they saw the one who, loving them, gave his life for their redemption. The glad tiding of this Christ became for them not an object, but rather an occurrence, happening in their midst as though it were a powerful explosion that rearranged the whole of reality (3:1-2). The Spirit of Christ invaded their hearts; they were baptized into this corporate Son of God; and, impelled by the Spirit of Christ, they now cried out to God as their new Father (3.27; 4.6).<sup>585</sup>

Martyn's reference to Galatians 3.27 indicates that he has water-baptism in mind when he speaks of being baptized into the corporate Son of God. In view of this, Martyn could be saying that the Spirit invades a person's heart through gospel proclamation, and then when they are baptized the Spirit incorporates them into Christ.<sup>586</sup>

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<sup>584</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 322, 374–76. Martyn describes baptism as the genesis of the Galatians' descent from God. Martyn, *Galatians*, 306, 341.

<sup>585</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 132. Richard Longenecker also portrays the beginning of the Christian life as a two-stage process in Galatians, Galatians 3.1-5 dealing with the initial stage where a new relationship with God is established by faith and the gift of the Spirit and Galatians 3.27 dealing with the second stage, baptism being "the outward sign and heavenly seal of that new relationship established by faith." However, Longenecker fails to provide justification, exegetical or otherwise, for his description of baptism as a sign and seal of faith. His suggestion that the metaphor of clothing oneself with Christ means to take on the characteristics, virtues and/or intentions of Christ appears to point more towards an ethical than a traditional Reformed sacramental view of baptism as a sign and seal. Indeed, there is a certain irony to Longenecker's appropriation of this language to describe baptism: Traditional Reformed arguments that baptism is a sign and seal appeal to the idea of covenant and argue that baptism is the circumcision of the new covenant, while Longenecker, like Barth, notes that if Paul had held such a view, he "could simply have settled the dispute in Galatia by saying that Christian baptism now replaces Jewish circumcision." R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 156. See Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xvi.4.

<sup>586</sup>On the other hand, if the reference to Galatians 3.27 is removed from the preceding quote what remains can stand as a description of baptism with the Spirit as an event which takes place when the gospel becomes an event in a person's life, when the Spirit of Christ invades a person's heart. It is noteworthy that Martyn does not directly link the coming of the Spirit with baptism. Rather, it is as those who have received the Spirit, who have been begotten by the power of the Spirit, that the Galatians cry to God as Father, and that they request and receive baptism.

However, there is little justification in Galatians for understanding the beginning of the Christian life as a two-step process. As Barth puts it, “it is ... more natural to assume that Gal 3.27 is looking back to the divine change” that took place when they were begotten anew by the Spirit of God at work in them.<sup>587</sup> Such an understanding of baptism is perhaps hinted at in Martyn’s suggestion that at their baptism the Galatians “heard the performative words announcing their incorporation into Christ, God’s Son (3.27), their adoption into God’s family as God’s sons (3.26), and their receipt of the Spirit of the Son. From their baptism onward the identity of the Spirit has been clear to them.”<sup>588</sup>

To speak of the words of baptism as performative may be understood to mean that through the words the baptizand is incorporated into Christ, adopted into God’s family, and receives the Spirit. But since coming to baptism was an expression of faith, was a fruit of the Spirit in their lives, the announcement of their identity in baptism does not so much bring about that identity as much as it expresses and clarifies the identity of the baptizand with the result that from their baptism onward their identity and vocation becomes increasingly clear to them. As Martyn puts it, Paul understood the Galatians to have been grasped by God in the realistic message of the death of Christ, “and their being so grasped was signified in the baptism by which they participated in the death of that condemned criminal (3.13, 26-29).”<sup>589</sup> Having received the Spirit of Christ through gospel proclamation, there is no need for a second sending of the Spirit, a second divine begetting. Instead, water-baptism is an enacting of this identity, a living out of an identity and vocation that they have received from God. As Barth put it, baptism is the “concrete moment in their own life in which they for their part confirmed, recognized and accepted” their identity as children of God in Christ: “They had themselves baptized into Christ (*εἰς Χριστόν*) when, along with those who baptized them, they could see and confess that they were men clothed upon with Christ, renewed and liberated in him.”<sup>590</sup>

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<sup>587</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 116.

<sup>588</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 391.

<sup>589</sup>Martyn, *Galatians*, 293.

<sup>590</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 116. For a complimentary understanding of baptism in Galatians, see Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 383, 860–63. Similarly, referring to Galatians 3.26-27 in his *Sacramental Theology* Herbert Vorgrimler states that



## 5.4 Romans 6.3-4

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Barth notes that Romans 6.3-4 has been treated as a *locus classicus* of the doctrine of baptism in the New Testament, and while he admits that this is not intrinsically impossible he suggests that it is “undoubtedly difficult.”<sup>591</sup> Noting that a full exposition of this passage would require an analysis of the broader context of Romans 5 - 8, Barth focuses his discussion on how the passage fits within the narrower context of Romans 6.1-11.

Barth observes that baptism is not the theme of the passage, reference to baptism being made within the context of a larger argument that, in Christ, Christians have died to sin: “They have no future as sinners, because they have no possibility of existence as such.... Since they are dead with Christ, their existence as sinners is irrevocably behind them. What is before them with and in Him can only be a new and different life.”<sup>592</sup> Commenting specifically on 6.3, Barth notes that the Christian is to “remember that they were baptized into the death of Christ, in which their own dying as sinners took place,” but he insists that their dying with Christ took place in the event of Christ’s death rather than in the event of their baptism. For Barth, the saving event of Christ’s death is the true theme of the passage, and this saving event does not require any “repetition, extension, re-presentation or actualization.”<sup>593</sup>

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“faith causes human beings to become ‘children of God’; baptism announces (publicly) the condition of being buried with Jesus and the will to remain united with him in new life.” Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, 105. See Schwager, “Wassertaufe,” 52–53.

<sup>591</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 117.

<sup>592</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 117.

<sup>593</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 118.

Barth supports his case by observing that the text does not speak of Christians as being crucified in their baptism, as dying in it, but as being buried with Christ in baptism: “In this burial with him they were not crucified and put to death with him. When they had been crucified and put to death with him, then, in view of his death in their place, which enclosed within it their own death, they were - in baptism - buried, laid to rest, interred with him.” Just as Christ’s burial followed his crucifixion and death as “the final confirmation that he truly died,” he argues that the Christian’s baptism is a confirmation that they were included in his death, that they have died with him: “This burial with him, their baptism ... is the regular confirmation of the fact that they have died with him and in him. It is not the actual conclusion of their existence as sinners, but the dramatic concluding line which denotes it.”<sup>594</sup>

Barth suggests that this understanding of the image of being buried with Christ by baptism underscores the thesis of the immediate context, baptism being a vivid reminder that the Christian can not go back, but can only move forward:

Done away once and for all in the death of Christ, their existence as sinners is behind them; before them there is only a walk in newness of life corresponding to the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is the great change in their situation which is graphically indicated, but not brought about, by their burial with Christ, and hence by their baptism.<sup>595</sup>

Romans 6.3-4 is another of the texts where Barth’s exegesis is criticized by both Webster and Yocum. Even Cochrane, who otherwise judges Barth’s exegesis to be “restrained and convincing,” finds Barth’s argument concerning Romans 6 “unnecessarily strained.” Of the texts considered thus far, however, it is Barth’s argument concerning Romans 6.3-4 that is most closely paralleled in contemporary discussions.

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<sup>594</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 117.

<sup>595</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 118.

Barth is surely correct in his observation that baptism is not the theme of the passage. In Romans 6 Paul does not set out to teach about baptism but to demonstrate the absurdity of those who are in Christ continuing to sin in order that grace might abound, the absurdity of the idea that followers of Christ might continue to live sinful lives so that their unrighteous lives might underline that salvation is by grace.<sup>596</sup> Robert Jewett places this passage within the larger context of Paul's argument by suggesting that Paul's goal here is to convince combative house and tenement churches

that there is a solid basis for overcoming sin and pursuing a new life in Christ without the imposition of divisive laws. To be baptized into Christ's shameful death is to quite the life of sin. The divisive competition for honor is exposed and laid to rest by the cross. If the Roman believers can understand the deeper meaning of their incorporation into Christ's death, which they had experienced in an ecstatic manner, they will be able to welcome each other as fellow children of God despite their differences and will be in a position to cooperate in mounting the Spanish mission.<sup>597</sup>

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<sup>596</sup>James D. G. Dunn, "'Baptized' as Metaphor," 307 n.42. Herbert Vorgrimler suggests that Romans 6.1-11 "is not a sacramental-theological explication of baptism," but is instead "a comprehensive exposition of the reasons for the new ethical life of Christians." Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, 104. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), 308; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 395, 400; Robert C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967), 7-10; A.J.M. Wedderburn, "Hellenistic Christian Traditions in Romans 6?" *New Testament Studies* 29 (1983): 341-43; Alistair Campbell, "Dying with Christ: The Origin of a Metaphor?" in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Essays in Honour of R.E.O. White*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 273-93.

<sup>597</sup>Jewett, *Romans*, 398. For Jewett's discussion of the importance of the social implications of Paul's argument in Romans 5-8, see Jewett, *Romans*, 349-50, 357-63.

Something has happened to Christians which Paul uses three phrases to describe: they have been “baptized into Christ,” “baptized into his death,” and “buried with him by baptism into death.” (6.3-4).<sup>598</sup>

While familiarity with this text has made the association of baptism with death seem natural to many, Dunn notes that water-baptism was first of all a symbolic cleansing, and the association of this cleansing with death is not an obvious link.<sup>599</sup> There has long been a discussion of the possibility that Paul was dependent upon mystery religions for his linking of baptism and death in Romans 6, but it is at least as likely that the association between baptism and death with Christ has roots within the Christian tradition.<sup>600</sup> In Galatians Paul had spoken of Christians as dying

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<sup>598</sup>There is an ongoing debate concerning whether the phrase “baptized into Christ” should not be understood as an abbreviation of “baptized into the name of Christ.” Dunn argues that it should not, explaining that the former retains the metaphorical sense of immersion or submersion while the latter is a baptismal formula that refers to the rite of baptism in terms of a metaphor drawn from the world of commerce. Dunn argues that “to identify the usages simply has the effect of confusing both metaphors. James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 307–08. Dunn notes that Hartman questions the interpretation of “‘into the name of’” in terms of commerce, but Dunn argues that Hartman “gives insufficient weight both to the range of metaphorical usage in Paul... and to the fact that ‘baptized into the name of Paul’ results in the slogan ‘I belong to Paul’ (1 Cor 1.12-13); and he settles for a rather vacuous connotation for the phrase (baptism ‘with regard to Christ’), which does no justice to the sense of power attaching to a ‘name’ in such a formulation (cf. Acts 3-54, particularly 4.12, which he does not discuss), though he almost concedes the point on p. 86.” James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 308 n.45. See Hartman, *Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*, 42–44.

<sup>599</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 312. Jewett notes that “there is no evidence that the link between baptism and the death of Christ or the symbolic death of believers was explicitly developed even by Paul himself prior to the writing of Romans.” Jewett, *Romans*, 396.

<sup>600</sup>While acknowledging the a broad similarity exists between Romans 6.3-4 and the initiation rites of certain mystery cults, Dunn argues that “a direct influence from any mystery cult or from the Isis cult in particular... is most unlikely.” James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 308–10. Not least of the problems in establishing such a line of influence is the question of what Paul could have known about the mystery cults. As Dunn observes, “the mystery cults were very good at keeping their rites secret; so much so that we today know very little about them; more to the point, nonparticipants in the first century must have been more or less equally ignorant.” James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 327. See James D. G. Dunn, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” 306. Neil Elliott concurs: “The criticism of appeals to mystery cults and Qumran as the context for understanding Romans seem to me well placed: initiation rites of mystery cults were not common-knowledge, and so it is unlikely that Paul knew them or could have assumed that his audience would have known them; furthermore, it is difficult to say how prevalent and known the ideas expressed in the Dead Sea Scrolls might have been.” Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 43. Similarly, Agersnap observes that “it can now be established that the religio-historical interpretation of Rom 6.1-11 is outmoded, at least in the radical form which envisages that Paul depends directly and

with Christ (Gal 2.19), and as being baptized into Christ (3.27). If Paul was aware of the tradition that Jesus linked his own baptism and death (Mk 10.38-39; Lk 12.50), it would make sense for him to combine these two aspects of his own understanding of the Gospel.<sup>601</sup> Furthermore, the idea of dying with Christ makes sense within the context of the Adam-Christ contrast of 5.12-21: dying with Christ involves dying to sin and being free from the dominion of sin and death; their association with Christ and Christ's death decisively ends their association with Adam.<sup>602</sup>

But when did this death with Christ occur? In Galatians 2.19 Paul speaks of union with Christ's death quite apart from any reference to baptism. This seems to suggest that Paul understood death with Christ to have taken place prior to and apart from the event of baptism.<sup>603</sup> Furthermore, Paul expands his initial statement that those who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into his death as having "been buried with him by baptism into death." And as

positively on the mysteries." S. Agersnap, *Baptism and the New Life: A Study of Romans 6.1-14* (Oxford: Alden Press, 1999), 22. Agersnap refers to Günter Wagner, *Das religionsgeschichtliche Problem von Römer 6,1-11*, ATThANT (Zürich, 1962). See also A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology Against Its Graeco-Roman Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987); Alistair Campbell, "Dying with Christ".

<sup>601</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 312. See further James D. G. Dunn, "Birth of a Metaphor". Betz similarly argues that Romans 6 represents an elaboration which reinterprets and develops the simpler baptismal statement of Galatians 3.26-27. H. Betz, "Transferring a Ritual: Paul's Interpretation of Baptism in Romans 6," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. T. Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 86, 107. See also Jewett, *Romans*, 397. Fergusson suggest that "the question, 'do you not know?' implies a common teaching in regard to baptism" that Paul draws upon, and that therefore "the connection of baptism with the death of Christ for human sins was part of the early Christian message." Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 155. However, Jewett notes that in classical parallels this expression is used to introduce "material that the audience does not yet fully comprehend as the speaker or writer thinks they should." Jewett, *Romans*, 396.

<sup>602</sup>See Jewett, *Romans*, 395-96. See Dunn's discussion of the significance of the Adam-Christ imagery for Romans 6 in James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 313, 317-18, 325-33.

<sup>603</sup>Noting this, Robert Jewett suggests that "the sequence of the argument from Rom 6.2 to 6.3 confirms that such a death on the part of the converted as occurring prior to their baptism. Jewett, *Romans*, 397-98. Wedderburn notes that Paul makes "much the same point about dying with Christ as far as sin is concerned" in a variety of other passages (Rom 7.4; 7.6; 2 Cor 5.17; Gal 2.19; 5.24; 6.14). While he acknowledges that "in many of these texts scholars have seen quotations of, or allusions to, baptismal traditions," he argues that this is "an assumption that needs to be questioned. Here, as elsewhere, there is the tendency to assume the presence of baptismal traditions where there is little real evidence for it." A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection*, 49. See also Betz, "Transferring a Ritual," 111-12.

Barth has argued, it is significant that Paul speaks of being buried in baptism, but not of dying in baptism.

There are no precedents in Greco-Roman or Jewish culture for any religious use of the term *συνετάφημεν* (co-buried), it being an expression which “refers literally to being buried in a shared grave or to participants joining together in burying the deceased.”<sup>604</sup> In the New Testament it is a uniquely Pauline expression, appearing only in Romans 6.4 and Colossians 2.12.<sup>605</sup> The reference to Christ’s burial in 1 Corinthians 15.4 may provide a clue to the significance of the reference to burial in Romans 6.

1 Corinthians 15.3-4 contains one of the earliest formulations of the Christian *kerygma*: “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.” A number of scholars have noted that this *kerygma* includes a reference to Christ’s burial as a distinct moment from his death.<sup>606</sup> Robert Jewett clearly articulates this view, suggesting that the language of co-burial with Christ reflects this early *kerygma*, drawing on the idea that, as “the climactic moment in the ritual of dying,” burial is not the event of a person’s death so much as the concluding confirmation of that death: “It is the point of no return.”<sup>607</sup> Noting that Rom 6.4 is linked with vs. 3 by *οὖν* (therefore), Jewett

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<sup>604</sup>Jewett, *Romans*, 398. The translation co-buried is suggested by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993), 434.

<sup>605</sup>On Paul’s *σύν* compounds, Jewett refers to Walter Grundmann, “σύν-μετά κτλ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and G.W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 790. Jewett, *Romans*, 398. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 313.

<sup>606</sup>Jewett, *Romans*, 398. Dunn also notes that the reference to Jesus’ burial here probably echoes the kerygmatic formula of 1 Cor 15.3-4. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 314. Dunn cites G. Barth 100, and Halter, 41, 49, with bibliography. Agersnap also allows that 1 Cor. 15.3-4 may contribute to explaining the language of burial here. Agersnap, *Baptism and the New Life*, 269–70.

<sup>607</sup>Jewett, *Romans*, 398. Dunn explains that “the event of dying, of departure from this world, was first really concluded by burial.” James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 314. See R. Schnackenburg, *Baptism in the Thought of St Paul* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 34. Similarly, Agersnape notes that “a vital idea at that time was that one is really dead only after internment. Burial then becomes a final confirmation of the reality of death.” Agersnap, *Baptism and the New Life*, 269. Fergusson, on the other hand, argues that “that we ‘were buried with him through baptism’ implies that our baptism was more than ‘with reference

suggests that the “co-burial reference is clearly an argumentative inference from the preceding verse... The finality of burial shuts the door against the frivolous question in v.1: if one is truly both dead and buried to the life of sin, continuing therein is impossible.”<sup>608</sup> To speak of being buried with Christ in baptism is not synonymous with speaking of dying with Christ in baptism, or being crucified with Christ in baptism.<sup>609</sup>

Furthermore, when Paul continues on to discuss the old self being crucified with Christ (6.6) and having died with Christ (6.8), the language of baptism is no longer present. Already in 6.5 the image of burial in baptism has been replaced by biological, or perhaps horticultural, imagery: *εἰ γὰρ σύμφυτοι γεγονάμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ* (for if we have become knit together with the very likeness of his death).<sup>610</sup> There is considerable debate concerning the meaning of

to his death’ but was ‘into his death,’ and so that the statement in Romans 6 “suggest that baptism is more than something done with reference to his death but is an actual participation in it.” Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 156. Here Ferguson is countering the views of Beasley-Murray and Schnackenburg, and does not address of the issue of whether burial is to be equated with death.

<sup>608</sup>Jewett, *Romans*, 398. Agersnap also notes the appropriateness of the idea of burial for Paul’s argument: “At a burial, the corpse is got out of the way. The old person who was ruled by sin has been finally cleared away (cf. Rom 6.2, 6).” And this sets the scene for Christ’s resurrection and for the Christian’s new life. “When in Rom 6.4a [Paul] chooses to describe baptism as a burial with Christ, he indeed achieves a comparison between the two events which precede the Christian’s new life and Christ’s resurrection.” Agersnap, *Baptism and the New Life*, 270–71.

<sup>609</sup>Noting that burial with Christ occurs “through our baptism,” Jewett argues that Paul’s view is “that the death with Christ that occurs at the time of conversion precedes baptism, which is presented here as the ritual reenactment of incorporation into that death.” Jewett, *Romans*, 398–99. See Daniel G. Powers, *Salvation Through Participation: An Examination of the Notion of the Believers’ Corporate Unity with Christ in Early Christian Soteriology* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 158. Similarly, Vorgrimmler states that “the burial, which in itself is not a saving event, points to the reality of having died, so that the content of the symbolic action of baptism is as follows: in it the one being baptized recognizes that she or he has died on the cross with Jesus Christ *long before* this present action.” Vorgrimmler, *Sacramental Theology*, 105. Vorgrimmler adds, however, that “the salvation of humanity consists in this unity with Jesus, here made tangible, so that baptism is really a saving event, and not a mere memorial.” See Schwager, “Wassertaufe,” 41–47, and the list of exegetical literature in Schwager, “Wassertaufe,” 4.

<sup>610</sup>While this is the only time *σύμφυτος* appears in the NT, it was widely used in secular contexts. Dunn translates it as “knit together,” arguing that it is probably a biological rather than a horticultural image. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 316. Jewett prefers “a generic translation such as ‘joined together’ or ‘united together,’ which implies that believers share an indivisible, organic unity with Christ.” Jewett, *Romans*, 400.

the dative expression *τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ*. Jewett notes that some argue that “the likeness of his death” should be “understood as the instrumental means by which the believer is united with Christ,” so that baptism is understood as a likeness of Christ’s death which joins a person to Christ.<sup>611</sup> He points out, however, it is unlikely baptism would be described as a likeness of Christ’s death. After all, Christ was crucified, not drowned.<sup>612</sup> Furthermore, Jewett points out that such an interpretation “lacks plausibility” because it “requires the translator to supply *αὐτῷ* (to him) as the object of ‘joined together’.”<sup>613</sup> And Dunn notes that “the perfect tense of v5a indicates a continuing state” so that if the likeness of Christ’s death was the immersion of baptism, this would imply that the Romans remain under water. Dunn also observes that such an understanding implies a meaning for *ὁμοιώματι* that is incompatible with v5b: “the future tense of v 5b points to something other than a rite already completed... and so rules out also the suggestion that *ὁμοιώματι* carries the implication of ‘sacramentally present in baptism’ (Schneider, *TDNT*, Kuss, Mussner, Schlier).”<sup>614</sup> Finally, Dunn suggests that those who discuss 6.5 “under the heading of baptism (eg. Kuss, Schnackenburg, Dinkler, Black) forget that the theme of the passage is ‘died to sin’ (v 2) and that vv 3-4 are only the initial working out of that theme, with baptism providing the first way of speaking about the Christians’s union with Christ in his death.”<sup>615</sup> Thus, Dunn argues that “the likeness of Christ’s death” is equivalent to “Christ in his death,” so that to be joined with the likeness of Christ’s death means to be joined to “the reality of Christ’s epoch-ending, sin’s-dominion-breaking death, in its outworking in the

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<sup>611</sup>Jewett, *Romans*, 400.

<sup>612</sup>This is one of a number of reasons why Agersnap suggests that it is doubtful that baptism was understood as a likeness to Christ’s death: i) “It is doubted that the original meaning of *βάπτισμα*, ‘immersion,’ was still heard after it had become a technical term for baptism”; ii) “the text is not interested in the emersion from the baptismal water”; iii) “it is doubtful that baptism was practiced as total immersion in New Testament times.” Agersnap, *Baptism and the New Life*, 268–69.

<sup>613</sup>Jewett, *Romans*, 400.

<sup>614</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 317. See Robert. C. Tannehill, *Dying*, 32–35; O. Kuss, “Zu Röm 6:5a,” in *Auslegung und Verkündigung*, vol. 1 (Regensburg: Pustet, 1963); F Mussner, “Zur paulinischen Tauflehre in Röm 6:1–6,” in *Praesentia Salutis: Gesammelte Studien zu Fragen und Themen des Neuen Testaments* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1967), 189–96.

<sup>615</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 317. See also Jewett, *Romans*, 399–400.



here and now, Christ's death to the extent that it can be experienced and is effective within the still enduring epoch of Adam."<sup>616</sup>

## 5.5 Conclusion

While this chapter addresses only four of the eleven texts which Barth discusses in his exegetical answer to the sacramental tradition, its arguments support Barth's conclusion that these texts do not provide exegetical justification for a sacramental understanding of baptism. While both Ephesians 5.26 and Titus 3.5 refer to a cleansing, in neither case is there evidence that this cleansing was identified with baptism. In the course of exhorting husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, Ephesians 5.26 uses the image of a bridal bath to speak of Christ's work on the cross where he enacted his purifying love for the Church. Titus 3.5 speaks of the cleansing by the outpoured Spirit, promised in the Hebrew Scriptures and experienced paradigmatically at Pentecost.

While both Galatians 3.27 and Romans 6.3-4 associate the rite of baptism with being united with Christ, neither text explains that union with Christ occurs through baptism. Galatians clearly connects reception of the Spirit with gospel proclamation so that baptism is a subsequent expression and clarification of the Christian's union with Christ rather than its initiation. And

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<sup>616</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 317–18. (cf. Schlatter; Gewiess; Thüssing, Goppelt, Morgan)" (317) - Death to sin (Frid). Quite apart from the question of what it means to be baptized into Christ's death, Dunn argues that the phrasing of Romans 6.3 does not settle the question of the relationship between the rite of baptism and the event which is described as being baptized into Christ's death: "In itself the phrase leaves open the question of whether the divine act happens in and through the ritual act (as 6.4 may imply) or is rather imaged by the ritual act (as the metaphorical usage coined by the Baptist suggests... With regard to the former, there is nothing in Paul to show that he intended to use the verb in an all-embracing sense - 'baptized,' either as the inner reality effected in conjunction with or even by means of the human action, or as a description for the whole sacramental reality (there is some danger of reading the more sophisticated sacramental theology of later centuries into the language here). As the Baptist's words, which stand uniformly at the beginning of the gospel in all four cases, clearly indicate, 'baptize' in reference to the ritual act and 'baptize' as a metaphor can stand side by side without conflation or identification... the point is wholly ignored by Wilckens when he refers to Acts 1.5 and 11.16 simply to 'Christian baptism' (2.51), and describes 'the experience of baptism .. (as) the central "datum" of the beginning' (2.23), ignoring the stronger evidence that it was the experience of the Spirit which originally filled this role of primary datum." James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 312. See U. Wilckens, *Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Zürich: Benzinger, 1980), 23, 51. Fowler assumes that the theme of baptism continues through vs 11, arguing that baptism signifies a present "resurrection... in anticipation of the eschaton," but his brief discussion does not engage with the arguments against this view. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol*, 186–88.

describing baptism as co-burial with Christ, rather than as a dying with Christ, Romans 6 similarly portrays baptism as a confirmation of the Christian's union with Christ rather than its cause.

## 6 Conclusion

From the fact that God accompanies and blesses [the Church] on its erroneous ways, may one conclude that these ways are pleasing to God and that it can and should continue to walk in them?<sup>617</sup>

This study set out to do justice to Barth's doctrine of baptism, responding to largely unsubstantiated dismissals of Barth's exegesis through careful exegetical engagement with the issues involved. Bearing in mind Barth's reminder that all interpretations are probabilities and approximations, and that the most we can hope for is relative certainty, this study renders a positive assessment on the plausibility of Barth's doctrine of baptism with respect to two key issues concerning which his exegesis has been heavily criticized: That of his distinction between baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water, and the centrality of the baptism of Jesus by John for his account of baptism with water.

Chapter three takes up the question of distinguishing water and Spirit baptisms, arguing that there is no indication in the New Testament that baptism with the Spirit is tied directly to water baptism as if baptism brings it about, or even that water baptism is a prayer that God would baptize with the Spirit. This result is supported positively by the narratives in Acts where reception of the Spirit appears as a distinct event, sometimes following and sometimes preceding the rite of baptism. Negatively, the language of baptism makes good sense when understood metaphorically where it is used in conjunction with the Spirit in the Synoptics and 1 Corinthians 12.13. Furthermore, chapter five shows that this result is not falsified by texts which are usually appealed to in support of a sacramental understanding of baptism.

This study has also supported the plausibility of Barth's claim that the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist is the basis for Christian baptism, and is therefore of primary importance for a doctrine of baptism. Chapter four supports Barth's argument that Matthew 28.18 is properly a missional text, and reinforcing his case through an argument that baptism in water was a characteristic of the Jesus-movement throughout.

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<sup>617</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 190.

The most significant variance between the New Testament witness and Barth's doctrine of baptism appears to be his ordering of baptism with the Spirit as strictly prior to water-baptism. In Acts 2, the exhortation to be baptized is accompanied by a promise that those baptized will receive the Holy Spirit, and in the narratives of Acts 8 and 19 the Spirit is received subsequent to baptism. Taking the baptism of Jesus as a model further supports this, the Spirit descending upon Jesus after his baptism. And Barth's own accounting of the distinction between Christian baptism and John's baptism creates ambiguity on this issue when he suggests that Christian baptism includes an *expectation* of the imparting of the Spirit that is "more tense and lively," and Christian baptism as a "petition for baptism with the Spirit."<sup>618</sup> Any attempt to further develop Barth's understanding of Baptism would need to account for this variance.

A related exegetical challenge for Barth's doctrine of baptism is the question of whether the salvific work of the Spirit should be distinguished from the Spirit's prophetic work of empowering for witness: Is baptism with the Holy Spirit the beginning of the Christian life, or is it a subsequent event where believers are gifted for specific ministries of witness? While this issue is not addressed in this study, Barth's very brief discussion of this issue provides a slim exegetical basis for his conclusion that "baptism of with the Holy Spirit" refers both to the beginning of the Christian existence and to the empowerment of believers for witness in a vocational sense.<sup>619</sup> In addition to responding to the arguments of this study, further assessment of the plausibility of the exegetical foundation of Barth's doctrine of baptism would need to take up this issue.

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<sup>618</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 77–78.

<sup>619</sup> Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 31. Turner suggests that the key question is whether "the gift of the Spirit [is] *essentially* the power of eschatological sonship (and ethical renewal?), or is it *essentially* the power to witness to the Gospel?" Turner, *Power from on High*, 36. Barth would reject these as alternatives. For an introduction to the exegetical issues related to this question as well as a clear account of the history of the debate up until 1996, see Turner, *Power from on High*. Turner judges that the strongest case that Luke fused prophetic and soteriological conceptions of the Spirit is found in Dunn's 1993 response to his Pentecostal critics. Turner, *Power from on High*, 70–72. See James D. G. Dunn, "Baptism in the Spirit: A Response to Pentecostal Scholarship on Luke-Acts," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3 (1993): 3–27.

## 6.1 The weight of Tradition

It must be said up front: relations between guild exegetes and the church's theologians have long been testy and mostly continues to be.<sup>620</sup>

Perhaps the most significant outstanding issue, however, is whether the exegetical case made in this study is sufficient to counter the “ancient and overwhelmingly strong ecclesiastical and theological tradition” that Barth is opposing.<sup>621</sup> Yocum suggests that “given the weight of the tradition of interpretation Barth is resisting, if his exegetical case is to be convincing, it would need to be much more clear-cut and more reliant on the straightforward meaning of passages that relate to baptism.”<sup>622</sup> Are the arguments presented clear-cut and straightforward enough to counter the weight of the long exegetical tradition which Barth is challenging?

A potential problem with Yocum's suggestion, however, is that the weight of the tradition has given the impression that the meaning of passages is so straightforward that other positions are not taken seriously with the result that “obvious exegetical features and indicators of (or pointers towards) meaning have been more or less totally ignored.”<sup>623</sup> The suspicion of being influenced by one's dogmatic framework applies as much to traditional readings as it does to the arguments presented in this study particularly because of the ecclesiastical practices and traditions which favour these readings. While Barth's theological predilections undoubtedly influence his reading of the text, the strength of the exegetical tradition is undoubtedly driven by ecclesial practices which fuel assumptions, the familiarity of which make them all the more difficult to recognize. It is not surprising that with such strength to the Tradition, learning to read in ways that challenge tradition and Tradition will not come easily.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>620</sup>Robert W. Jenson, “On Dogmatic/systematic Appropriation,” 154.

<sup>621</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 102.

<sup>622</sup>Yocum, *Ecclesial Mediation*, 164.

<sup>623</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Pneumatology*, xi.

<sup>624</sup>Of course, this goes both ways. I readily acknowledge that the ecclesial traditions which have shaped me influence the arguments I have put forward.

Of course, some might question the importance of learning to read in ways that challenge the church's exegetical tradition. Returning to an issue discussed in the first chapter, some might grant that the arguments presented in this study are plausible but object that they rely too heavily on historical critical exegesis, ignoring the exegetical tradition of the church. Robert Jenson states the issue pointedly: "Historical honesty requires the church to interpret Scripture in light of her dogmas. If the church's dogmatic teaching has become false to Scripture, then there is no church and it does not matter how the group that mistakes itself for church reads Scripture or anything else."<sup>625</sup> Jenson argues that it is the existence of the "diachronically identical universal church" which resolves the hermeneutical challenges that arise from the historical and cultural distance between the contemporary church and the New Testament:

There is *no* historical distance between the community in which the Bible appeared and the church that now seeks to understand the Bible, because they are the same community...our present effort to understand a handed-down text cannot be hopeless, since it is merely the further appropriation of a continuing communal tradition within which we antecedently live.<sup>626</sup>

But when it comes to baptism, however, there are deep divisions within the continuing communal tradition. The "diachronically identical universal church" exists in time in the form of a diversity of churches and traditions; the Tradition is diverse and complex, including a broad diversity of ecclesial practice and scriptural interpretations.<sup>627</sup> The result is rival communities of interpretation, each of which finds ways of reading scripture in light of their dogmas and church practices and so to justify their convictions and practices: As Donald Wood observes, one of the

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<sup>625</sup>Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University, 1999), 281.

<sup>626</sup>Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 279–80. See Hans Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965), 250–90.

<sup>627</sup>Returning to the issue of reading in ways that challenge the tradition, the exegetical arguments presented in this study are not a great departure from the tradition as I received it in the faith communities that have formed me. Understandings of the diversity and complexity of the concrete existence of the diachronically identical universal church will differ significantly, depending on where one draws the line between church and groups that, in Jenson's words, mistake themselves for church.

pitfalls of theological interpretation of scripture is that, “like all forms of communal self-reflection, it can easily decline into self-justification.”<sup>628</sup>

Therefore, while giving confidence that the interpretive task is not hopeless,<sup>629</sup> the existence of a continuing communal tradition does not obviate the importance of historical critical exegesis; that is, “interpretation steered by determination to find out about... Jesus and the apostles who tell of him... as they were in their times and places and as they were conditioned by them, precisely as these were *not* our time and place.”<sup>630</sup> As Jenson observes,

Paul cannot enrich my apprehension of the gospel so long as I presume his apprehension and mine must obviously be the same. Historical critical reading of Scripture is, at least where Christianity and modernity or postmodernity overlap, the necessary “self-criticism by the interpreter with respect to... possibilities of self-deception about what the ... text intends.”<sup>631</sup>

It is hoped that the use of Biblical scholarship has been in the service of receiving the witness of the apostles and prophets with respect to the issues at hand.<sup>632</sup>

John Howard Yoder’s discussion of the role of historical criticism is helpful here. Yoder suggests that “moderately competent respect for linguistic and historical tools can serve to let the text

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<sup>628</sup>Wood, *Barth’s Theology of Interpretation*, x.

<sup>629</sup>Though I would add that it is the Christ’s promised presence and activity through the Spirit gathering, upholding, and sending the communities that are the concrete existence of the diachronically identical universal church that is the basis of hope, rather than simply the fact of a continuing tradition of interpretation.

<sup>630</sup>Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 278.

<sup>631</sup>Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 278. See Ebling, *Wort*, 451.

<sup>632</sup>*C.f.* Burnett’s characterization of Barth’s exegesis as a receiving the witness of the prophets and apostles, over against the tendencies of Biblical exegetes: “The dominant science of biblical exegesis does not receive the prophets’ and apostles’ witness. It does not even grant them - at least in any fundamental or primary sense - the role or status of witnesses. Instead they are regarded primarily and fundamentally as sources.” Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis*, 216.

speak for itself.”<sup>633</sup> For it is only if the text can speak for itself that it is able to not only legitimate, but also criticize present and previous readings:

I am committed to letting the text itself judge every prior use which anyone, including myself, has made of it. I learned (from good high school English teachers, and from the practice of careful reading, but with strong subsequent confirmation from the witness of Karl Barth and that of Paul Minear) the great value of approaching a text with the assumption that it might have something to say, so that the form of suspicion which is most valuable is not doubting the text, but doubting the adequacy of one’s prior understanding of it.<sup>634</sup>

Because the church’s traditional readings of Scripture are not exempt from this suspicion, Yoder suggests that the texts of Scripture should be approached with the assumption that they might have something critical to say to the tradition of the church, with a “readiness to doubt whether past majority positions have been adequate.” While he acknowledges that some might describe this as a “hermeneutic of suspicion,” Yoder suggests that “a more irenic description might be ‘sitting loose to tradition’ or ‘openness to alternative hypotheses’.”<sup>635</sup>

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<sup>633</sup>John Howard Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 49. Yoder acknowledges that “‘the text’ can never be read ‘purely,’ with no contribution at all from the reader,” but suggests that, “it is possible to get much closer to the authorial intent, precisely by using the critical skills of the scholar.” Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 69. In insisting on the need for historical disciplines, Yoder does not intend to subject the testimony of scripture to historical critical criteria, filtering what it may or may not say through an historicist filter. Hence he qualifies his appeal to historical tools by asserting that while “we can learn much from sceptical historiography, . . . the one thing it is not equipped to resurrect for us is the real history” Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 95. Rather, Yoder suggests that historical tools function like a dictionary, helping to define terms and make the text intelligible Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 82. In this regard, Craig Carter identifies similarities between Yoder and Hans Frei, suggesting that Yoder’s hermeneutic is “what Frei terms a lower-level understanding of hermeneutics as ‘the rules and principles governing exegesis’.” Craig Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 101. See Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ. The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), xvi.

<sup>634</sup>Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 50.

<sup>635</sup>Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 54.



Far from being in conflict with an affirmation of the church's continuing communal tradition, Yoder notes that self-critical reading of Scripture arises from within the tradition itself, a primary reason for putting together the Scriptures being for the community to subject itself to the normative witness of the earliest tradition: "The development of a selection of writings, recognized as authoritative by the churches, constitutes the final proof, delivered by the church itself, that the church does not claim final authority but rather subjects herself to the witness of the apostolic age."<sup>636</sup> Yoder makes this statement not so much about the quality of the canon (e.g. inspired, apostolic) as about the "accountability of the Christian community as a movement within history, whose claim to be faithful to her historical origins in the midst of historical change obliges her to identify the criterion of that accountability."<sup>637</sup> It is Yoder's contention is that the early Church identified the Scriptures as the criteria of accountability, and that in doing so, it pointed to a norm by which its own understanding and articulation of the Gospel could be critiqued.

What we then find at the heart of our tradition is not some proposition, scriptural or promulgated otherwise, which we hold to be authoritative and to be exempted from the relativity of hermeneutical debate by virtue of its inspiredness. What we find at the origin is already a process of reaching back again to the origins, to the earliest memories of the event itself, confident that that testimony, however intimately integrated with the belief of the witnesses, is not a wax nose, and will serve to illuminate and sometimes adjudicate our present path.<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>636</sup>Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 94. "The historical function of a body of Scripture is not simply to inform or to legitimate. It is also to stand in judgment upon later history as a source of alternative definitions of norms, so that the Scriptures can provide a point of reference which is at the same time outside and inside, distant yet recognized as legitimate, for the ongoing conversation of the historical community with its historical origins." Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 102.

<sup>637</sup>Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 94

<sup>638</sup>John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 70.

Or, as Paul put it, scripture is useful not only for training in righteousness, but also for reproof and correction.<sup>639</sup>

This brief discussion of Yoder is taken from an unpublished paper, “Does Yoder throw the Christological Baby out with the Constantinian Bathwater?” In this paper I argue that Yoder does not advocate a “primitivist” appeal to the pristine purity of the first century church, but that the growth of the Christian tradition is more like a vine that needs occasional pruning than a tree; The growth of the tradition has been a mixture of faithfulness and unfaithfulness and needs to be periodically restored by a “renewed appeal to origins,” not in order to “recapture some pristine purity” but rather to “enable a midcourse correction” or even “new beginnings.”<sup>640</sup> Yoder excludes a “primitivist” interpretation, emphasizing that such a new beginning “is not a start ‘from scratch,’ going ‘back to “Go”’,” but is “a new event in God’s history, a new formulation of God’s good news.” Such a new beginning need not involve a “retreat out of history,” an attempt to avoid centuries of Christian tradition by looping back to the Bible. To the contrary, Yoder suggests that he takes history “with ultimate seriousness as under God’s judgment and promise.”<sup>641</sup>

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<sup>639</sup>2 Tim 3.16.

<sup>640</sup> While Yoder speaks of a “mid-course correction” in *The Priestly Kingdom*, in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* Yoder twice denies that the needed renewal of the church is adequately described as a “mid-course correction,” insisting instead that it be described as a “new beginning.” John Howard Yoder, “The Restitution of the Church: An Alternative Perspective on Christian History,” in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G. Carthwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 137.

<sup>641</sup> Yoder, “The Restitution of the Church,” 137. In light of this affirmation of God’s judgment and promise, of divine activity enabling new beginnings, Yoder worries that the language of mid-course correction might be understood to limit the renewal of the church to that which is “accessible in continuity with the present.” To the contrary, Yoder suggests that some of the wrong turns that have been taken are of such a fundamental character that the renewal that is needed involves the kind of discontinuity that only God makes possible. Far from being a thoroughgoing historicist, Yoder believes that the renewal of the church is not ultimately constrained by the bounds of historical probability or possibility. It is the historicist who limits the renewal of the church to such “mid-course corrections.” For Yoder, there are occasions where the renewal of the church is “not a mid-course correction *within the presently possible*, but ... a new beginning in the power of God.” John Howard Yoder, “The Forms of a Possible Obedience,” in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G. Carthwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 123.

While Yoder affirms the providential action of God within the history of the Christian tradition, his understanding of God's providential activity assumes that wrong turns are both possible and actual. He rejects the doctrine of the indefectibility or infallibility of the church if it is understood as a guarantee that there is "something about the empirical Church that can never go wrong."<sup>642</sup> For Yoder the future of the Church is not ensured by its never going wrong, but in the promise that in spite of going wrong, God will never abandon it: "The future of the Church is sure in the sense that God is a God who gives life to the dead."<sup>643</sup> Barth points to a similar affirmation of the church's existence under the promise and judgment of God, noting that "in the history of Israel the patience of God manifests its greatness and therewith also its limits in certain great judgments and disasters which were made unavoidable by the obstinacy of Israel. There can be no guarantee that a Church which is only too faithful to its ancient errors will for ever escape these."<sup>644</sup>

## 6.2 Prospects

Theology can and should do no more than advise the Church. It would be as well for the Church, of course, if it would occasionally ask seriously for the advice of theologians, and if it would then listen to it no less seriously.<sup>645</sup>

In the first place this study makes a contribution to Barth scholarship with respect to the assessment of the exegetical plausibility of his doctrine of Baptism. While not claiming to be definitive, the exegetical arguments advanced invite careful exegetical engagement. It is my

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<sup>642</sup>Yoder, "The Forms of a Possible Obedience," 122–23. See also his rejection of both Roman Catholic and Hegelian versions of indefectibility which assert an ongoing authority institutionally or culturally and philosophically. Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 98.

<sup>643</sup>Yoder, "The Forms of a Possible Obedience," 123. This clear affirmation of God's providential activity within the life of the church is an important aspect of his thought. God's power to bring about new beginnings, indeed, to give "life to the dead" is Yoder's answer to both the historicist, and to those asserting the indefectibility of the Church. Yoder, "The Restitution of the Church," 140. Though one might agree with Carter that Yoder failed to emphasize the importance of the resurrection sufficiently, and that had he done so, he might have forestalled some of the criticisms that he was an historicist. See Craig Carter, *The Politics of the Cross*, 105–09.

<sup>644</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 194.

<sup>645</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 194.

contention that Jenson's concern that "theology should not put too many of the faith's eggs in a possibly fragile scholarly basket" should not deter theologians from the difficult work of serious engagement with Biblical scholarship.<sup>646</sup>

This study also makes a modest contribution to contemporary discussions of the use of scripture in theology, providing an exemplar of how contemporary New Testament scholarship might play a significant role in theological interpretation. The results of this study invite further conversation about whether they are sufficiently established as well as the question of whether the method of the argument is appropriate to the question at hand. It may be that the Biblical witness is simply under-determined with respect to the questions at issue so that we conclude with Richard Schlüter that "the validity of a sacramental conception can only be decided in the context of systematics,"<sup>647</sup> or at least that more attention should be paid to the reception-history of a text. Of these two possibilities, I would tend to put more emphasis on contemporary theological concerns than on the reception-history of texts, though recognizing that contemporary theological concerns are significantly shaped by the history of theology and so the reception-history of the Biblical witness.

One of the most interesting parts of this reception-history is the immediate post-Apostolic period. Barth's radical challenge to traditional baptismal theology and practice amounts to saying that the church made a fundamentally wrong turn with respect to its understanding of baptism very early on so that the understanding of baptism that appears to have been held nearly universally from quite early on is at variance with that found in the apostolic writings. In addition to inviting investigation into the basis of such a claim (i.e. exegetical counter-argument), this claim raises questions about when, how, and why such a shift took place. Is there unity or diversity in the earliest extra-biblical witness concerning baptism? How much do we know about the immediate post-apostolic period on this issue? My, admittedly very preliminary, thoughts are that the evidence is too sparse to be conclusive but that the divergences between some of the early

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<sup>646</sup>Robert W. Jenson, "On Dogmatic/systematic Appropriation," 156.

<sup>647</sup>Clausert, "Karl Barth's Tauflehre," 224, citing Schlüter, *Karl Barths Tauflehre*, 244f.

sources are evidence of uncertain and shifting interpretations of baptism in the immediate post-apostolic period rather than the passing on of a received tradition.<sup>648</sup>

While this study has supported the exegetical plausibility of particular aspects of Barth's doctrine of baptism, I will conclude with two suggestions for how Barth's doctrine of baptism might be fruitfully modified and developed. These suggestions lie beyond the scope of this study and are merely suggestions for future thought rather than developed proposals. I readily admit that they are insufficiently thought through and may create more problems than they solve.

The first is to suggest that setting aside language of "baptism with the Spirit" may help clarify and fruitfully develop Barth's account of the divine side of the beginning of the Christian life. On the face of it this is a radical suggestion, but on closer examination I think it is not so drastic. After all, Barth admits that he is taking a "certain exegetical liberty" in using the concept of baptism with the Holy Spirit to describe the divine change that brings about the beginning of human faithfulness.<sup>649</sup>

The issue with the language of "baptism with the Holy Spirit" is that the language of "baptism" has come to be entirely defined by the ritual act of water-baptism so that water-baptism becomes

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<sup>648</sup>See for example, the divergent understandings evident in *2 Clement* and Ignatius. For a discussion of *2 Clement* and Ignatius, see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 207–09. Furthermore, one of the earliest pieces of non-biblical evidence, the *Didache*, clearly displays an understanding of baptism at variance with that at evidence in Galatians 3.27: "For the Didachist, baptism does *not* create an egalitarian community. Gentile Christians are 'second-class citizens,' and are ultimately expected to embrace Torah observance. (One must become a Jew in order to be a Christian...." Nathan Mitchell, "Baptism in the Didache," in *The Didache in Context: Essays on Its Text, History, and Transmission*, ed. Clayton N Jefford [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995], 255. Quoted in Bryan D. Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the New Testament to the Council of Trent* [Burlington: Ashgate, 2006], 16. In his comments on Justin Martyr's 1st *Apology* (c. 150), Spinks helpfully points out that one must not move too quickly from particular historical sources to a general picture of the immediate post-Apostolic period: "One must bear in mind that Justin's group may have been of Syrian or Palestinian ethnicity, and his practice of baptism and its rationale should not be interpreted as being that of all the Christian groups in Rome; it is the practice of one group in Rome at this time." Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals*, 26. More generally Spinks concludes that "the early evidence allows us only to document what happened in certain places at certain times, and is not sufficient to build some universal picture." Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals*, 35.

<sup>649</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 30

a lens through which Spirit-baptism is understood. The metaphorical meaning of “baptism” tends to get flattened so that baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water come to be understood as two instances of baptism, two kinds of one thing. As a result baptism with the Spirit comes to be envisioned as an unrepeatable punctiliar event which takes place at a particular time and place. And this gives rise to the question of the precise temporal and logical relationships between two baptisms, baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water, and to the difficulty in accounting for the various narratives in the book of Acts.

And, I suggest, such an understanding the work of the Spirit as an unrepeatable punctiliar event which takes place at a particular time and place gives rise to difficulties in understanding Barth’s conception of the divine side of the beginning of the Christian life. While there is a “once-for-allness” to the way Barth speaks of the divine side of the beginning of the Christian life as a *beginning*, he notes that this beginning is “not perfect... not self-sufficient, definitive, or complete,” and that the divine work that follows can be described as a repetition of this beginning rather than simply its working out or continuation. While there is a “once-for-allness” to baptism with the Spirit “this fact should not prevent or obscure the insight that the baptism with the Holy Ghost... is an event which takes place once for all times and therefore (to put it generally at first) on several occasions.”<sup>650</sup> Making an analogy with the already and not-yet of

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<sup>650</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 39 That the divine beginning of the Christian life is an event which must take place repeatedly in a person’s life is anticipated earlier in the *Church Dogmatics*, such as in Barth’s explanation that one of the reasons that Christians can never “renounce their solidarity with non-Christians” is that Christians are themselves also non-Christians: “The poverty and obscurity of our knowledge of Jesus Christ, the half-heartedness of our life in the given freedom, the uncertainty of pilgrimage, in short, the imperfection of our Christianity, signifies that it is only with one foot, and perhaps only our toe-nails, that we are on solid ground, but that for the rest we dangle over the abyss in daredevil acrobatics. This will not do. But it is what we do. We cannot be Christians and non-Christians. But we are. What has to be said basically and materially concerning our being as Christians in these circumstances is thus valid only in the light of this very dangerous contradiction which is never resolved in our historical existence and situation as Christians.” Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV/3 of *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 342. See also Barth’s description of the knowledge of our being in Christ and so also our response as something which is hidden, the penetration of this hiddenness so that “we see him and ourselves in him, and love him in return” being an event rather than a state: “To see and know Jesus Christ and ourselves, there has to be a penetration and removal of that which hides. And this penetration is always an event; an exception and not a state.” Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV/2 of *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 286–87. Commenting on these passages, William Stacy Johnson notes that for Barth “each new day one must cease to be non-Christian and begin to be Christian; and each new day one must invoke the Holy Spirit for this gift.” William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern*

the coming of the kingdom of God, Barth explains that those who have been baptized by the Spirit do not cease to be in the position of those who ask for the Spirit; “they have to receive him again, and hence to pray for him.”<sup>651</sup> Thus, Barth can describe baptism with water is an attestation of baptism with the Spirit which is its presupposition while at the same time being also a petition for baptism with the Spirit: “The water baptism which is given to the community and desired and received by the candidates is the human action which corresponds to the divine action in the founding of the Christian life, which goes out to meet this, which responds to baptism with the Holy Spirit *and cries out for it.*”<sup>652</sup>

Given that Barth does not use the language of baptism with the Spirit as a technical term for an unrepeatable punctiliar spiritual event in a person’s life, I suggest that the language of baptism with the Spirit is better understood as simply one of a number of Scriptural metaphors referring to the work of the Spirit in bringing about human faithfulness than as “the epitome of ... the divine change which is the primary foundation of the Christian life.”<sup>653</sup> Such a shift in understanding would, I think, remove some of the difficulties and misunderstandings associated with the language of baptism with the Spirit.<sup>654</sup> It would be particularly helpful for clarifying the relationship between baptism with water and the divine side of beginning of the Christian life,

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*Foundations of Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 131–32. For Johnson’s discussion of Barth’s repudiation of the idea of an *ordo salutis* and the importance of vocation for Barth’s understanding of Christian life as a “tensive existence stretched out between conceptual ‘presuppositions’ and experiential ‘consequences’,” see Johnson, *The Mystery of God*, 139–48.

<sup>651</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 77–78.

<sup>652</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 105. Emphasis added. A similar circularity is present in III/3 where Barth explains that understanding the essence of prayer involves “rather a strange and apparently circuitous path” where diving hearing precedes and is the basis of human asking: “Prayer derives from what the Christian receives. It is simply the human fulfillment of this receiving, the direct expression of the life of the one who stands amazed at what God is and does for him.” Karl Barth, *Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III/3 of *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 270.

<sup>653</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 30.

<sup>654</sup>After all, baptism with the Spirit is not the only or even the primary way that the Spirit’s work is spoken of. We have seen that it is not used frequently in Scripture, but is only one of a number of ways of speaking of the Spirit’s work in a person.

allowing one to speak of water-baptism as a sign that the Spirit has been at work bringing human faithfulness to birth in a person's life without in any way denying that the Spirit continues to be at work in the event of water baptism and afterwards: As a concrete, public, exemplary step of obedience and hope baptism with water can be understood as a concrete sign of the prior and ongoing work of the Spirit in a person's life.

Some such conception of the Spirit's work seems to correspond to becoming Christian, i.e. one who knows themselves as reconciled to God in the history of Jesus Christ, who confesses that they have been crucified with Christ, as one who has been clothed with Christ, who has a new heart and is a new person at the core of who they are; as one who knows themselves as a covenant partner who is empowered, invited, commanded and encouraged to human faithfulness, to acts of obedience and hope.<sup>655</sup> Becoming such a person is a process that is sometimes long in duration and sometimes short, sometimes more clearly evident and sometimes less so, but in any case it is the Spirit at work in a person's life that brings about this understanding and frees a person for faithful human response. That this takes place in a person's life is the work of the Spirit in the beginning of the Christian life. It seems to me that Barth's account of the beginning of the Christian life might be compatible with such a perspective, and that setting aside the language of "baptism with the Spirit" could help clarify and develop his account. One of the issues that would have to be addressed if this line of thinking were pursued is how to reconcile it with the fact that the Biblical witness, particularly the narratives of Acts, seem to invite us to speak of a "reception" of the Spirit, a "baptism with the Spirit."<sup>656</sup>

My other suggestion is to ask whether Barth's understanding of baptism might be fruitfully developed by setting aside his explicit rejection of "sacrament."<sup>657</sup> I am not suggesting that Barth's understanding of baptism be understood or described as sacramental but that the polemic against sacrament is unhelpful. While Barth clearly rejects the sacramental understandings of

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<sup>655</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 13–14.

<sup>656</sup> Could such language be understood, not as the beginning of the Christian life of the work of the Spirit in a person's life, but as some other particular kind of work of the Spirit, perhaps even unique?

<sup>657</sup> A lot depends on what one means by the language of sacrament, and it seems to me that there is quite a variation.



baptism with which he is familiar, this may not exclude the possibility that there are other sacramental understandings of baptism which are not incompatible with understanding baptism as “the human action whose meaning is obedience to Jesus Christ and hope in him.”<sup>658</sup> It could be that Barth’s rejection of sacrament was based on too narrow an understanding of the language of sacrament.<sup>659</sup>

After all, Barth certainly did not understand baptism as an event in which God is absent or inactive. Indeed, he immediately follows his rejection of the three classical forms of traditional baptismal teaching with an affirmation that “God, who as such is the *auctor primarius* of all creaturely occurrence, is specifically in the work and word of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit the free Lord of the action of the community which bears witness to him, and therewith of its baptism too.” Barth’s denial of sacrament should not be understood as a denial of God’s action “within and on [the community], his presence, work and revelation in their whole action, and therewith in their baptism.”<sup>660</sup> Indeed, Barth asks, “how could baptism, along with all the

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<sup>658</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 105.

<sup>659</sup>In his recent study of Barth’s ecclesiology Tracy Mark Stout affirms Stanley Fowler’s judgment that “Barth’s rejection of the sacramental nature of baptism was directed only at a certain form of sacramentalism, in which the divine act overshadows and basically excludes the human act or in which the church seeks to mechanically control the Spirit,” and argues that “neither of these is necessary for an adequate sacramental understanding of believers’ baptism.” Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism*, 80. See Fowler, *More Than a Symbol*, 195. Stout suggests that ethicizing baptism did not need to deacramentalize the church, and that had Barth considered the sacrament of believers’ baptism he could have found a way to “fully affirm both the freedom of God and the ethical nature of the church’s life and practices without denying the Holy Spirit a part in the church’s practices. Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism*, 67. Stout describes the sacrament of believers’ baptism as a human act which is an “effective, participatory sign, not merely an external or pointing sign... The human act of baptism requires the faith enabled by the Spirit and is used by God as a sign of his activity in the world.” Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism*, 81. While this statement might be a friendly amendment to Barth’s account, this is not the case with Stout’s statement that “Baptism signifies and, by God’s activity becomes our death and burial with Christ... and our cleansing from sin and beginning of a new, resurrected life;” that “the *grace bestowed in baptism*... allows us to live within Christ’s completed work.” Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism*, 82. Emphasis added.

<sup>660</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 105. For his account of the Roman Catholic understanding of baptism Barth follows Bernhard Barthmann, *Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, vol. II, 7th (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1929), 208ff, 251ff and especially Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik*, vol. IV, 3rd/4th (München: M. Hueber, 1952), 5ff, 109ff. Barth basis his portrayal of Lutheran baptismal theology on his reading of confessional documents and Heinrich Schmid, *Die Dogmatik der evang. Luther. Kirche*, 2 (Erlangen: Carl Herder, 1847). For his portrayal of Reformed baptismal theology Barth cites Calvin, *Institutes*, IV 14f, Reformed

action of the community and the individual Christian, be a true answer if the action of God were not present and did not precede and follow it in his work and word?”<sup>661</sup> Furthermore, that the work of the Spirit in bringing about human faithfulness precedes and follows baptism does not preclude such work also taking place at the time of baptism.

What is crucial for Barth, however, is that God and humans are doing different things. God is active calling forth, accompanying, and following the action of the community in baptizing and the action of the candidate in requesting and being baptized, but it is the candidate requests baptism and the community that baptizes; God is present and active bringing about human faithfulness, freeing a person and demanding baptism (in Barth’s terminology, baptizing with the Spirit), but it is the people who God “liberates and summons” that enact obedience and hope in baptism.<sup>662</sup> The enactment of obedience and hope in baptism by candidate and community is eloquent, is an integral part of the witnessing ministry of the community as it accompanies, expounds and illumines “the divine change in a person’s life... the beginning of her Christian life.”<sup>663</sup>

In light of this perhaps Barth could describe baptism as a sacrament in the sense of being a “visible word,” in the sense of being “a communal action that speaks promise in Jesus’ name.”<sup>664</sup>

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confessional writings, and Heinrich Hepp, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* (Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1958). He also notes that his *The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism* belongs to the Reformed tradition.

<sup>661</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 106.

<sup>662</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 106 *cf.* James McClendon’s proposal that baptism be understood as a triply-enacted “remembering sign” which declares “the present presence of Christ with his people” and “marks the conversion of one who takes the way of Jesus.” James Wm McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine*, Systematic Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 386–400.

<sup>663</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 32

<sup>664</sup>Robert Jenson, *Visible Words: The Interpretation and Practice of Christian Sacraments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 7. In Jenson’s account any “distinguishable repeated form of the gospel’s life in the church” is a sacrament, and “since the gospel’s tradition is continuously creative, new institutions are regularly added to the deposit,” with the result that there are indefinitely many sacraments. Robert Jenson, *Visible Words*, 8, 11. While such an understanding of the language of sacrament might be

In obedience to the command of God the Reconciler, in baptism the community speaks the promise that is God's reconciliation of the world to himself in the history of Jesus Christ. Laying aside the polemic against sacrament would, I think, help to illumine Barth's understanding of baptism as faithful human action which bears witness to the divine action to which it responds and corresponds. Drawing on the final excursus of the introductory paragraph to Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation, both baptism and the Lord's supper are forms which God has "permitted and entrusted and commanded" to the community in their "answering, attesting and proclaiming of the one act of revelation and salvation;" They are two forms of "the Christian life in invocation of God... actions of human obedience for which Jesus Christ makes his people free and responsible." And as they respond and correspond to God's work and word, they truly speak promise in Jesus' name, having "the promise of divine good pleasure," being "radiant in the shining of the one true light in which they may take place and which they have to indicate in their own place and manner as free and responsible human action." And as such, they "are well done as holy, meaningful, fruitful human actions."<sup>665</sup>

At the very least, setting aside this polemic might open up the possibility of more fruitful engagement between Barth's thought and contemporary discussions of church practices such as baptism and the Lord's Supper. Had Barth been writing the baptism fragment today, perhaps he

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compatible with Barth's account of baptism, I am not sure that such a broad definition of sacrament might not add more confusion than clarity to the discussion.

<sup>665</sup>Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, 46. It should be noted, however, that it is only by being distinguishable and repeatable that baptism and the Lord's Supper may be distinguishable repeated forms of the gospel's life in the community. God's presence and promise similarly precedes, accompanies, and follows all of the varied forms of the life of the community as it answers, attests, and proclaims the one act of revelation and salvation. This is why Baptism and the Lord's Supper belong to Barth's ethics of reconciliation, rather than to a separate account of "Sacraments." Gerald Schlabach notes that Thomas Finger suggests that Mennonites hold a similar "sacramental" view of the life of the community "insofar as they too expect the church to be a visible sign of divine reality. If anything, observes Finger, Mennonites are 'supersacramentalists,' for they insist 'that divine reality becomes visible through all the material features of the Christian life, and not simply through a few special rituals.'" Gerald W. Schlabach, ed., *On Baptism: Mennonite-Catholic Theological Colloquium 2001-2002* (Kitchener: Pandora, 2004), 12.

For further discussion on Mennonite-Catholic conversations about baptism, see Julia Hildegard Smucker, "Reflection on Community and Discipleship: Toward a Mennonite-Catholic Convergence on Baptism," *Pro Ecclesia* 22, no. 1 (2013): 69-87.

would not have found the prospect of debate with his contemporaries to be comparable to standing at the bottom of the crater of Vesuvius.

## Appendix

Chapter 5 addresses four of the texts from Barth's excursus in which he offers an exegetical answer to the sacramental baptismal tradition. Two of these (Ephesians 5.26 and Titus 3.5) are from the group of texts which associate baptism as washing, and two (Galatians 3.26 and Romans 6.3-4) are from the group associating baptism with union with Christ. These particular texts were chosen because they are key baptismal texts and Barth's treatment of them has been particularly criticized. This appendix supplements the discussion of chapter 5 through offering a discussion of another of the texts referring to baptism as washing (Hebrews 10.22) and another of the texts associating baptism with union with Christ (Colossians 2.12).<sup>666</sup> A brief discussion of John 3.5 and 1 Peter 3.21 rounds out the present argument by attending to these important Johannine and Petrine texts.

### Washing in Hebrews 10.22

Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Barth notes that Hebrews 10.22 does not contain an "express reference to baptism," but suggests that the language of having their bodies washed with pure water alludes to water baptism. He argues, however, that the message of the book of Hebrews more broadly makes it unlikely that the sprinkling of the heart by virtue of which a person can draw near to God is identified with the washing of the body with pure water.<sup>667</sup> Noting that the immediate context of Hebrews 10.22 is

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<sup>666</sup>Acts 22.16 is here omitted as this text adds little to the portrayal of baptism in Acts as discussed extensively in chapter 3. The association of baptism with the washing away of sins in Acts 22.16 picks up on the language of 2.38, and the relationship between baptism and this cleansing/forgiveness is not clarified beyond that found in 2.38. In particular, the question of whether baptismal cleansing symbolizes or is in some way causally related to forgiveness is not clarified.

<sup>667</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 112.

an exhortation that the Christian “make undeviating use of the entry into the sanctuary of God which has been opened and assured by the blood of Jesus Christ (v.19),” Barth insists that

Hebrews... knows no entry into the sanctuary but that which was opened and assured once and for all by the blood of Jesus Christ, and quite obviously it also knows of no *ῥαντισμός* (sprinkling) which is necessary for making use of this entry apart from that in which man participates again through the blood of Jesus Christ. Only in the power of what has taken place in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, of the *ῥαντισμός αἱμαρτιος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* (1 Pet. 1.2), only through the offering (*προσφορά*) of His body, are Christians sanctified (10.10), or, according to the present verse, cleansed from an evil *συνείδησις*, from the continually disquieted knowing together (with God) which characterizes the past with its constant sacrifices.<sup>668</sup>

Barth further underlines his identification of sanctification “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10.10) with the sprinkling in Hebrews 10.22 by making reference to Hebrews 9.14, where the purification of the conscience from the blood of Christ is juxtaposed with the sanctification of the flesh through “the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer.”

Barth understands the book of Hebrews to teach that the self-offering of Christ is the offering which cleanses, bringing about a change by virtue of which the Christian can approach God, the one who “knows, accepts and grasps this change” being able to approach God “with hearts cleansed by the truth of this reality.”<sup>669</sup> In view of this Barth argues that baptism, to which the washing of water alludes, is not a cleansing alongside that of Christ’s self offering but it “can and may and should remind ... of the cleansing which took place once and for all in the death of

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<sup>668</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 112–13.

<sup>669</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 113.

Christ.”<sup>670</sup> Barth insists that “according to the whole tenor of Hebrews there are no cleansings apart from that which took place in the death of Jesus Christ: neither that of the old covenant nor any new ones which might replace it,” concluding that “unless appearances deceive, one can hardly ascribe sacramental significance to baptism on the occasion of its mention in Heb 10.22.”<sup>671</sup>

One of the key questions for understanding Hebrews 10.22 is which Old Testament texts may be behind the use of the imagery of sprinkling of the heart from an evil conscience and washing of the body with pure water. With respect to “sprinkling of the heart” there are two main options. Firstly, the sprinkling of the heart might be an allusion to the sprinkling of blood which inaugurates the covenant. Thus, William Lane explains that

the specific the imagery of “the sprinkling of the heart from a burdened conscience” has been anticipated in Hebrews 9.18-22, where the writer reminded the community of the action of Moses, who sprinkled the people with the blood during the ratification of the old covenant at Sinai. The thought that Christians have been made participants in the new covenant by the blood of Christ is forcefully expressed in the immediate context (v 19). This suggests that the “sprinkling with respect to the heart” in v 22*b* is to be associated with Jesus’ inauguration of the new covenant through his death.<sup>672</sup>

The other possibility is that the sprinkling of the heart and washing of the body is an allusion to the purification of Aaron and his sons in their consecration as priests. As Lane notes, “when they

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<sup>670</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 113.

<sup>671</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 113.

<sup>672</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 8–13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1991), 287. See Exodus 24.3-8.

were installed in their office, they were sprinkled with blood and their bodies were washed with water.”<sup>673</sup>

While Lane judges the allusion to covenantal inauguration to be a “more satisfactory” explanation without much argument, Harold Attridge supports the covenantal interpretation by explaining that, while the sprinkling of Hebrews 10.22 “may suggest that the believers have experienced a priestly consecration,” the idea of the priesthood of believers is not explicitly developed elsewhere in Hebrews. Attridge notes that the author of Hebrews “seems more concerned with the general metaphor of interior purification (9.23) than with pressing the cultic imagery.”<sup>674</sup>

These are equally plausible understandings of “sprinkling of the heart.” While granting that the priesthood of believers is not developed in Hebrews, given that the reader is exhorted to enter the sanctuary which was the purpose of the cleansing of Aaron and his sons, the author of Hebrews may well have been reminding his readers that not only has Christ’s sacrifice inaugurated a new covenant but that it has cleansed them in such a way that they too can enter the sanctuary to approach God.

The question of the meaning of “having our bodies washed with pure water” is both more complex and more important for the present argument.<sup>675</sup> Here there are at least four possibilities. “Washing of the body with pure water” may be paired with the language of hearts sprinkled to evoke the reference to the sprinkling and cleansing of Aaron and his sons in their priestly consecration. On this understanding, sprinkling and washing make up one Old Testament reference with the result that the meaning of Hebrews 10.22 is that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ

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<sup>673</sup>Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 288. See Exod 29.4; Lev 8.12, 30; 16.4.

<sup>674</sup>Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 288.

<sup>675</sup>Peter Leithart is right to note the importance of the language used in Hebrews, and to criticize Barth for failing to do justice to the language of Hebrews 10.22, noting that where “Hebrews speaks of ‘pure water’... Barth prefers the more abstract ‘Waschung’ or ‘Reinigung’.” Leithart, “Womb of the World,” 52.



accomplishes a priestly cleansing so that believers, like Aaron and his sons, can freely approach God.

A second possibility is that the language of “pure water” and “washed bodies” alludes to Levitical cleansings more broadly. Lane notes that “in the LXX *ὕδωρ καθαρόν*, ‘pure water,’ is an expression for the water used in ritual purification (Num 5.17; Ezek 36.25; cf. *T. Levi* 8.5),” and that “the formula for washing the body is technical (cf. Lev 14.9; 15.11, 13, 16, 27; 16.4, 24, 26; Num 19.7-8; Deut 23.12 LXX).”<sup>676</sup> He further observes that in Hebrews 9.13-14 the author “has contrasted the cleansing that affects only the body with the decisive purgation that reaches to the conscience and makes possible the service of God.”<sup>677</sup> A possible reading of this is that a person needs both the Levitical system and the sacrifice of Christ to be clean in heart and body; Christ’s blood cleanses the conscience, but the Levitical system is needed to cleanse the flesh. If so, Hebrews 10.22 may be intending to combat such a view. In pairing language of Levitical cleansing of the body with language bringing to mind Christ’s decisive cleansing of the conscience, it may be that the author is assuring the reader that the sacrifice of Christ accomplishes the cleansing of both heart and body; that the blood of Christ which cleanses the conscience is also the washing of their bodies with pure water which cleanses their flesh so that there is no barrier to their approach to God, either of the heart or of the body.

On the other hand, it is possible that the language of pure hearts that are “sprinkled” clean in association with “pure water” alludes to the other occurrence in the LXX of *ὕδωρ καθαρόν*, “pure water”: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you”(Ezek 36.25). Ezekiel’s prophecy looks forward to a sprinkling with “clean water” that will be a decisive cleansing; it will be the giving of a “new heart and a new spirit” that will result in obedience and renewal of covenant between Yahweh and Israel: “I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezek 36.27-28). The fact that the author of

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<sup>676</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 8–13*, 287.

<sup>677</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 8–13*, 287.

Hebrews has already portrayed the new covenant in Christ as the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant in 10.16-17 renders the presence of an allusion to this other Old Testament prophetic text more plausible.<sup>678</sup> An allusion to Ezekiel introduces a third possibility for understanding both the washing with water and the sprinkling of the heart: Through alluding to Ezekiel's prophecy the author may be saying that by virtue of Christ's high priestly work the Hebrews' hearts have been sprinkled clean in fulfillment of this prophecy.

A fourth possibility is that in using the language of washed bodies the author of Hebrews has shifted from a metaphorical to a literal reference. Rather than referring to one of the washings found in the Hebrew scriptures whose reality has been found in the self-offering of Jesus Christ, perhaps the language of having their bodies washed refers to the literal washing of their bodies in baptism. If this is so, the language of bodily washing here puts Christian baptism in association with the sprinkling clean of the heart, and thereby with Christ's self-sacrifice. There are then two further possibilities for understanding this association.

Baptism could be an event which reminds the Christian of the event which cleansed their hearts. If the sprinkling which cleanses the heart is understood to be the event of Christ's self-sacrifice, the bodily washing of baptism is a reminder of the decisive cleansing accomplished on the cross. This is how Barth understands the passage. On the other hand, baptism could be the event which cleanses the heart. In this interpretation, the sprinkling which cleanses the heart is understood to be the occasion or instrument for the application of the benefits of Christ's self-sacrifice to the individual or the appropriation of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice by the individual. Thus, the bodily washing of baptism is a cleansing of the body which, unlike the Levitical cleansings which cleansed only the body, is accompanied by, or even causes in some sense, the decisive cleansing of the heart. If this is the case, Christian baptism is portrayed in sacramental terms, as the outward and visible sign of the inward and invisible cleansing of the heart.

Both Barth and the majority of New Testament scholars favour variants of the fourth possibility, that the reference to "bodies washed with pure water" refers to baptism. Barth understands the event of Christ's self-offering to be the event which cleanses the heart and baptism as an event

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<sup>678</sup>Quoting Jeremiah 31.33-34

which points to the event of cleansing. Many New Testament scholars view Christ's self-sacrifice as an event in the past which is then applied to individuals in the present, with the result that the sprinkling of the heart is not an allusion to the event of the cross as much as it is a reference to the application of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice to an individual.<sup>679</sup>

It is difficult to decide which of these two interpretation is to be preferred. The problem is that there is not a lot of evidence to work with. Up to this point in the argument, the author of Hebrews has spoken of the efficacy of Christ's self-sacrifice without making any reference to the question of how his readers come to benefit personally from this sacrifice. While Barth's understanding of the universal efficacy of Christ's self-sacrifice is not articulated by the author of Hebrews, neither is the view that Christ's sacrifice was an event which procured certain benefits that needed to be applied to specific individuals.

Furthermore, even if Christ's sacrifice was understood to be applied to individuals through some event in their lives, the association between baptism and that event is not defined in Hebrews 10.22. If Hebrews 10.22 includes a reference to baptism, the most that can be said is that it associates baptism with the cleansing of the heart by the blood of Christ. There is simply no evidence in Hebrews whether it might have been understood as a reminder, an occasion, or even somehow a cause, of this cleansing. Many New Testament scholars simply assert that Hebrews 10.22 presents baptism as the occasion of the appropriation of Christ's sacrifice to the individual. Attempts to justify this claim by asserting that "the effects of Christ's death and exaltation were regularly understood to be appropriated by believers" in baptism are unhelpful in the present context where the interpretation of these other texts is also in question.<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>679</sup>For example, echoing the classic description of a sacrament as an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible change, F.F. Bruce explains that in Hebrews 10.22 baptism consists "not merely in the outward application of water, but in the outward application of water as the visible sign of the inward and spiritual cleansing wrought by God in those who have come to him through Christ." F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 255. Similarly, Harold Attridge states that Lane's questioning of a baptismal reference in Hebrews 10.22 is "quite unfounded." Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 289.

<sup>680</sup>Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 288–89.

The question of how baptism is related to the cleansing of the heart by the blood of Christ only arises, however, if the washing of the body with clean water is a reference to baptism. Most New Testament scholars assert this but provide little in the way of argument.<sup>681</sup> On the other hand, Peter O'Brien notes that the author of Hebrews

has given no overt signals “that he has the Christian rite in mind.”  
 Instead [the author of Hebrews] continues his use of Old  
 Testament washing imagery, in connection with the purification  
 rites found in the Pentateuch (see Heb. 9.13), in order to  
 communicate that the work of Christ has prepared believers to  
 enter the presence of God.<sup>682</sup>

In view of this, O'Brien favours the view that sees a connection between Hebrews 10.22 and Ezekiel 36.25-26: “Thus the sprinkling of the heart and the washing of the body with ‘pure water’ express the same thought: the effective power of the death of Jesus that has been brought about by the eternal Spirit (9.14).”<sup>683</sup>

The drawback of explaining the imagery of Hebrews 10.22 in light of Ezekiel 36 is that it does not explain why the washing is “of the body.” Thus the first two possibilities presented above are the most likely. A general reference to purification rites of the Old Testament accounts for the images of sprinkling, washing of the body, and the language of pure water, while also fitting well with the earlier references to these rites in Hebrews. A more specific reference to priestly

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<sup>681</sup>Peter Leithart is an exception here. Noting that sacrifice is now “offered in the church’s praise and good works (Heb. 12.28-13.17), Leithart argues that Hebrews envisions “an ecclesiological fulfillment of Old Testament rites and institutions” and that the language of “bodies washed with pure water” surely refers to physical washing in baptism. Leithart, “Womb of the World,” 52. Leithart’s argument is that Hebrews 10.22 presents baptism as a washing “that confers... priestly tasks and privileges,” i.e. drawing near the heavenly sanctuary, and should therefore be understood as the ecclesiological fulfillment of priestly ordination. Leithart, “Womb of the World,” 50–51. As argued above, however, the language of “bodies washed with pure water” could be intended to evoke similar the Old Testament language such that Hebrews is offering a christological rather than an ecclesiological fulfillment of priestly consecration.

<sup>682</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 368.

<sup>683</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 368.

purification also accounts for the images of sprinkling and washing of the body fits broadly within the pattern of connecting the new covenant to the old, and fits well with the immediate exhortation to make use of the entry into the sanctuary opened by Christ.

Barth's rejection of a Hebrews 10.22 as a sacramental baptismal text is confirmed by this argument. The argument that Hebrews 10.22 is making a general reference to Old Testament purification rites fits well with the broader context and is supported by linguistic clues, while the argument that it is a reference to baptism is based on an assumption that a washing of the body would have referred to baptism without much in the way of concrete textual support.

## Circumcision and Burial in Colossians 2.11-12

In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Colossians is another text which Barth identifies as associating baptism with union with Christ. Observing that in Colossians 2.12 the statement about baptism occurs in a parenthetical participial clause which agrees materially with Romans 6.4, Barth suggest that a statement about baptism might be made in the surrounding context which is less obvious, but no less important:

For in him (Christ) the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head (sovereign) of every rule (*ἀρχή*) and authority (*ἐξουσία*). In him you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.  
(Colossians 2.9-12)

While in Romans 6 Paul argues that in light what Christ has done and of their relationship with Christ Christians cannot possibly continue in sin, Barth observes that in Colossians the identity of Christ and the reality of the Christian's relationship with Christ means that "they cannot

possibly let themselves be controlled or influenced by other realities, truths or laws which are supposed to be necessary to salvation.”<sup>684</sup> All fullness being in Christ, Paul explains that Christians share in this fullness because they are “circumcised in him,” (2.11) and they “are risen with him” (2.12). This being the case, Paul challenges the Colossians to “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God”(3.1).

Barth concedes that if, as many argue, 2.11 uses the metaphor of circumcision to refer to Christian baptism, understood as the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament rite of circumcision, “then in view of the lofty predicates ascribed to this circumcision in v. 11 it is clearly settled that we have in baptism a means, instrument, or channel of grace.”<sup>685</sup> He argues, however, that there are “serious objections” to such an interpretation of this passage: He notes that to understand the reference to circumcision as a reference to baptism would involve describing water-baptism as something not done with human hands; it would involve placing “you are baptized” in juxtaposition with the “you are risen...” of 2.12; it would make the argument against the rituals commended by the false teachers centre on baptism as the Christian alternative to these rituals.

Barth suggests that all of these difficulties disappear, however, if the “circumcision not done with hands” of 2.11 is a reference to the crucifixion of Christ; if the reference to the Colossians being buried with Christ in baptism in 2.12 points back to their dying with Christ in Christ’s death, i.e. Christ’s circumcision:

In this death of Christ which embraces them Christians receive a share in the fullness of the Godhead. This was the work done on them, not by human hands, but by God’s hand. In it the body of the flesh in which they existed was put off and set aside like an old garment. If v.11 speaks of the death of Christ which embraces Christians, its relation to the parallel v.12, which speaks of their resurrection with Christ, is meaningful; it is also one which is

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<sup>684</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 118.

<sup>685</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 119.

found elsewhere in Paul. The reference to Christ's death is a clear and cogent argument against the *ἑθελοθησκία* by whose onset the Colossian community was threatened. To call the death of Christ which embraces Christians his circumcision, i.e., the circumcision effected by God in him, is justifiable in a defense against Jewish-Gnostic ritualism, in which (cf. Col. 3.11) the demand for circumcision probably played a prominent part.<sup>686</sup>

Barth concludes that it is only by understanding the reference to circumcision in 2.11 as a reference to the death of Christ that the "reminiscence of baptism as the burial of Christians with Christ" supports the argument of the passage:

It is to this effect: Even in your own lives as Christians you began with the event in which your burial with Christ, and therewith your liberation from all autonomous attempts at deification or salvation, was concretely confirmed and registered by that which you yourselves desired and received from the community. Hold fast to this!<sup>687</sup>

Does the "circumcision" of 2.11 refer to baptism, or is it a metaphorical way of speaking of the Christ's death, in which the Colossians participate because they are "in Christ"? While many New Testament scholars hold the former, the latter interpretation seems more likely.

The reference to baptism in Colossians 2.12 occurs in the midst of a warning to beware of those who would take the Colossians captive "through philosophy and empty deceit in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elemental forces of the world, and not in accordance to Christ" (2.8).<sup>688</sup> Dunn observes that this warning is followed by a "semi-poetic" section of the

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<sup>686</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 119.

<sup>687</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 120.

<sup>688</sup>There has been extensive debate concerning the identity of the opponents in Colossians including a dizzying array of possibilities. Troy Martin reports the J. J. Gunter identified 44 possibilities in 1973 and that the work of R. E. DeMaris two

letter (2.9-15), which is “structured around a sequence of ‘in him/whom’ phrases (four in all) and 2.13c-15 on a striking sequence of participles (five in all).”<sup>689</sup>

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.

**For in him** (ἐν αὐτῷ) dwells all the fullness of the deity in bodily form,

**and in him** (καὶ ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ) you have come to fullness  
who is the head of every ruler and authority.

**In him also** (ἐν ᾧ καὶ) you were circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hand  
in the stripping off of the body of the flesh  
in the circumcision of Christ,  
having been buried with him in baptism

**In him also** (ἐν ᾧ καὶ) you were raised with him  
through faith in the effective working of God,  
who raised him from the dead

And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses. He cancelled the bond that stood against us with its decrees, which was opposed to us, and removed it by nailing it to the cross. He stripped off the rulers and authorities, exposing them to public disgrace, leading them in triumph in him.<sup>690</sup>

decades later identified additional possibilities. Troy W. Martin, *Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as a Response to a Cynic Critique*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1996), 3–14. See Richard DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1994), 18–40. Writing a decade after Martin, R. McL. Wilson reports that there continues to be no consensus on the identity of the Colossian opponents, noting F. G. Dowling’s critical review of Martin, “a critique the more telling in that it comes from the author of *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*. R. McL. Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 54. It is beyond the scope of this study to try to adjudicate this ongoing debate. However, I find Dunn’s argument that the Jewish Synagogue is the opponent in view in Colossians persuasive. See James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 34, 156. See also James D.G. Dunn, “The Colossian Philosophy: A Confident Jewish Apologia,” *Bilica* 76 (1995): 153–81. N.T. Wright makes a similar argues that “all the elements in Paul’s polemic in Colossians make sense as a warning against Judaism,” and that not only are other theories not necessary but neither are they sufficient: “they fall under their own weight, since they fail completely to explain the passage about circumcision in 2.11ff, and the extremely Jewish appearance of 2.16ff.” N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 24–27.

<sup>689</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 146. Dunn observes that attempts to reconstruct a primitive hymn or confession have gained little support. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 180

<sup>690</sup>Translation by Dunn, slightly altered with emphasis added.



The first “in him” picks up the language of the fullness of God being in Christ from 1.19, and the second “in him” assures the Colossians that in Christ they come to fullness.<sup>691</sup> Dunn notes that the “in him” from 2.10 is then continued through 2.11 to 2.12 (“in him you were circumcised,” “in him also you were raised with him”)<sup>692</sup> where it is supplemented by a sequence of *συν*-compounds (*συνταφέντες* - “buried with,” *συνηγέρθητε* - “raised with,” *συνεζωοποίησεν* - “made alive together with”).

Dunn’s view is that Colossians 2.11-15 aims to reassure the reader that being “in Christ” is sufficient, reinforcing the all-sufficiency of “the act of redemption and reconciliation already spoken of (1.14, 20, 22).”<sup>693</sup> He suggests that this passage is “probably intended as an elaborate attempt to describe the importance of what Christ accomplished on the cross and in his resurrection by means of a sequence of vivid metaphors (circumcision, burial and resurrection, death and giving life, forgiveness and cancellation of legal bond, public triumph).”<sup>694</sup> It is the cross of Christ that “renders unnecessary any further human traditions and rules.”<sup>695</sup>

One of the keys to such a construal of the passage as a whole is the argument that the language of circumcision in 2.11 is a metaphorical way of speaking of Christ’s death, a death that the Colossians participate in because they are “in Christ.” The Colossians, we read, have been circumcised in Christ “with a circumcision not done with hands,” that is, a spiritual rather than a physical circumcision.<sup>696</sup> This statement is followed by two relative clauses, “in the stripping off

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<sup>691</sup>who is subsequently described as “the head of every ruler (*ἀρχῆς*) and authority (*ἐξουσίας*) in an echo of 1.16.

<sup>692</sup>Dunn takes the *ἐν ᾧ καὶ* of 2.12 as “in whom” rather than “in which.” See comments below.

<sup>693</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 153–54.

<sup>694</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 154.

<sup>695</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 41.

<sup>696</sup>Referring to Mark 14.58, Acts 7.48; 17.24; Heb 9.11, 24; 2 Cor 5.1, Wilson notes that “such passages clearly show the contrast: *χειροποιήτος* refers to what belongs to this world, the work of human hands and therefore transitory, even fleshly (*c.f.* Eph 2.11... whereas *ἀχειροποιήτος* refers to what is spiritual and heavenly. In fact, Paul takes over the Jewish rite, and gives it a new interpretation: at Rom. 2.28-29 he says that true circumcision is not something external and physical, but a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal.” Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 201–02. See also J.M.G. Barclay, “Paul and Philo on

of the body of the flesh” (ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός) and “in the circumcision of Christ” (ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ).

While many interpret the unusual expression “body of the flesh” (τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκός) in light of how “flesh” (σαρξ) is used elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, understanding it to refer to human sinfulness or “sinful nature,”<sup>697</sup> Dunn notes that the other uses of “flesh” in Colossians refer to physical flesh. Colossians 1.22 is particularly important in this regard as here the expression “body of the flesh” is used to emphasize the physicality Christ’s body, and so the reality of his physical death.<sup>698</sup> Seen in light of 1.22 the “stripping off the body of the flesh” likely refers to literal death through the use of a phrase that emphasizes the physical nature of death. And given that the readers of the letter have not yet experienced physical death it seems likely that this expression refers to the death of Jesus: It is “an adaptation of the description of physical circumcision - a stripping off of the flesh (of the foreskin) - applied to Jesus’ death in deliberate echo of 1.22: in this case the flesh which was stripped away was the whole physical/fleshly

Circumcision: Romans 2.25–26 in Social and Cultural Context,” *New Testament Studies* 44 [1998]: 536–56. Similarly, Dunn suggests that Colossians is picking up on “the long-standing recognition in Jewish circles that circumcision ‘in the flesh’ had to be matched by circumcision of the heart, that is to say, it probably contains a reference to conversion... the circumcision of the heart wrought by the Spirit referred to elsewhere in Paul.” James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 156–57. See Deut 10.16; Jer 4.4; 1QpHab 11.13; 1QS 5.5; Jubilees 1.23; Philo, *De Speicalibus legibus* 1.305).

<sup>697</sup>Jerry Sumney states that *sarx* “refers to that element of our humanity that is dominated by evil,” and points to the similar phrase in Rom 6.6: “Body of sin.” Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians - a Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 137. Similarly, Margaret MacDonald suggests that “it is probable that ‘the body of the flesh’ refers to one’s sinful nature, which is removed at baptism.” MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 99. On the relationship between ‘flesh’ and ‘body’ in Pauline thought, MacDonald refers the reader to John A.T. Robinson, *The Body* (London: SCM, 1952). On the other hand, Dunn suggests that many translators “seem to want to avoid using ‘flesh’ at all cost” and therefore “produce unjustifiably tendentious translation (NEB ‘lower nature,’ REB ‘old nature’ NJB ‘your natural self,’ NIV ‘sinful nature,’ GNB ‘sinful self’),” commenting that N.T. Wright’s *Colossians and Philemon* “leaves the phrase itself much too far behind when he translates ‘in the stripping off of the old human solidarities’.” James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 157 n.19. See N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 106.

<sup>698</sup>Wilson notes that the phrase τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός is rare, citing its appearance in Sir 23.17, 1 En 102.4-5, and noting that it appears only twice in the Pauline corpus (Col 1.22 and 2.11). Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 203.

body.”<sup>699</sup> The connection between “stripping off” and the cross is reinforced when the noun “stripping off” (*ἀπεκδύσει*) in 2.11 is echoed in 2.15 by the use of the equivalent verb “strip off” (*ἀπεκδυσόμενος*) with respect to Christ’s public triumph over the rulers and authorities so that “on the cross there was a double ‘stripping off’: his physical body in death and the rulers and authorities in triumph.”<sup>700</sup>

A number of New Testament scholars object to interpreting “stripping off of the body of the flesh” (*ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός*) in terms of 1.22 by pointing out that 2.11 lacks the possessive pronoun found in 1.22 (in the body of *his* flesh - *ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ*). Dunn accounts for the lack of a possessive pronoun in 2.11, however, by arguing that the following phrase, “in the circumcision of Christ” (*ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ*), makes it clear whose body of flesh is stripped off.<sup>701</sup> Rather than identifying the circumcision in view as one

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<sup>699</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 157–58. Dunn notes that this represents a change of mind from his *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, but one which strengthens his conclusions. See James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 153. Dunn notes that such a use of spiritual circumcision as a metaphor for the death of Christ in which the Colossians are also included may represent a variation of Pauline Adam-christology: In his death “it was not simply ‘his’ flesh that Christ stripped off, but the flesh of the first Adam (cf. Rom 8.3), representing ‘all things’ in their dominion by the powers, this being necessary before he could assume his Adamic reign over ‘all things’ (cf. 1 Cor. 15.27, 45, 50). A cosmic circumcision of human flesh was a necessary preliminary to cosmic rule.” James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 158. Peter O’Brien responds to Caird’s argument that the image of death as a stripping off of the body represents a dualism which contradicts Paul’s theology of resurrection by suggesting that “it is possible that the term (*ἀπεκδυσόμενος*) (putting off), perhaps even a Pauline coinage, was chosen by him to underscore the point that Christ’s death was a violent and gruesome one, and to say no more than this. This language is clearly metaphorical, like the statements about being clothed and unclothed at death to which Caird refers (2 Cor 5) in his criticism of this view.” Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 117. Dunn also responds to this critique, point out that “Wolter 130-31 notes that the idea of the body or flesh as a ‘garment’ of the soul or something ‘put off’ was quite familiar in Jewish thought (e.g., Philo *Legum Allegoriae* 2.55 etc; 2 Enoch 22.8-9).” James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 158.

<sup>700</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 158. The language of rulers (*ἀρχαίς*) and authorities (*ἐξουσίαις*) echos the language of 1.13 and 1.16, reinforcing the connection between this passage and the christological opening of the letter.

<sup>701</sup>For example, while Margaret MacDonald allows that “the putting off the body of the flesh” could refer to Christ’s death, noting that in 2.15 the terminology of “stripping off” is used to refer to what Christ has accomplished through his death and resurrection, she argues that “if it did indeed refer to Christ’s death one would expect the presence of the possessive ‘his’ as in 1.22.” MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 100. Peter O’Brien notes that Lohse and Caird consider the omission of the personal pronoun in 2.11 serious, but suggests that “the omission... may have occurred because ‘the identification of the baptized with Christ is regarded as so close as to render a specifying pronoun out of place’ (Moule) or because the word ‘of Christ’ in the

that is given by Christ, Dunn suggests that the phrase “in the circumcision of Christ” is “a summary expression of the larger imagery of the preceding phrase. That is, what is in view here is not primarily a circumcision effected by Christ ... but a concise description of the death of Christ under the metaphor of circumcision.”<sup>702</sup> The result is that in 2.11 the death of Christ is being described as a circumcision (a stripping off of his body) and the Colossians are being assured that, being in Christ, they too have been circumcised (i.e. they “died” with Christ).

Coming to verse 12, the structure of the passage suggested above would suggest that the focus of the passage is not baptism but resurrection: not only have the Colossians died with Christ, having been spiritually circumcised in Christ’s death, but in Christ they have also been raised together with him (2.12b). Acknowledging that it is common to interpret the *ἐν ᾧ* of *ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγήρθητε* as referring back to baptism (“in/by which also you were raised together”), Dunn argues that the *ἐν ᾧ καὶ* here matches the *ἐν ᾧ καὶ* of 2.11, and so is the fourth in the sequence of

following phrase made clear whose body of flesh is stripped off in circumcision (So Gundry).” Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 117. See C.F.D Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1957), 95 and Gundry, *Soma*, 41. He also notes that “this interpretation has the added advantage of providing a plausible explanation of verse 15, namely that in Christ’s death God divested (*ἀπεκδυσάμενος*, the cognate verb to the rare *apekuisis*) the principalities and powers, leading them in his triumphal procession... Assuming the two phrases, ‘in the stripping away of the body of flesh’ and ‘in the circumcision of Christ,’ are construed alike (by regarding the two genitives as objective), then the meaning is that the body of flesh was stripped off when Christ was circumcised, that is, when he died.” Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 117. See also Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 152. Pointing to the overall structure of the passage, Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke add a third explanation for the absence of the personal pronoun in suggesting that it is best explained “in light of the emphatic ‘in him’ not only in v.11, but also in the whole paragraph; the pronoun was viewed as self-evident and therefore was left out.” Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Astrid B. Beck, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 365. Wilson follows Dunn in suggesting that “it is surely more natural to think of a circumcision undergone by Christ, and that in the light of 1.22 suggests that *he peritome tou xristou* here is a metaphor for the death of Christ,” citing Moule’s explanation for the absence of the pronoun. Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 204.

<sup>702</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 158 On the other hand, Sumney states that “circumcision of Christ” renames the circumcision done without hands and v12 identifies this circumcision with baptism so that ‘circumcision of Christ’ is an “entrance into Christ.” Sumney, *Colossians*, 138. Similarly, MacDonald suggests that the circumcision of Christ “likely refers to baptism by which one participates in the death and resurrection of Christ,” but acknowledges that there is considerable debate on this point. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 99. See also Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 103.

“in him/in whom” which structures the passage.<sup>703</sup> While acknowledging that the combination of “in him” (ἐν ᾧ) and “with him” (συνηγέθητε) is stylistically awkward, Dunn argues that it is not theologically so: “They are both common and overlapping ideas in Paul anyway; and precisely the same awkward combination occurs in the parallel Eph. 2.6 - συνεκάθισεν... ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ” (seated us with him ... in Christ Jesus).<sup>704</sup>

What then of the reference to baptism in 2.12a? Far from being the central theme of the passage, this reading understands it as a parenthetical remark associated with the preceding affirmation that the Colossians were spiritually circumcised in Christ by virtue of their inclusion in “the stripping off of the body of his flesh,” i.e. his death. It is “mentioned almost incidentally in a sequence of vigorous metaphors” reminding the Colossians of the ritual act in which they identified themselves with Christ, and so with his death: “Baptism, presumably by immersion, represented mimetically the commitment to enter the tomb with Jesus after he had been taken down from the cross. Since burial was understood as the conclusion of the event of dying (Stommel, Schnackenburg, Wedderburn), this commitment meant the enacted willingness to identify oneself with the complete event of Jesus’ death.”<sup>705</sup> Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke explain the appearance of a parenthetical reference to baptism as a burial with Christ may reflect the centrality of the affirmation of Christ’s burial to the Pauline gospel (See 1 Cor 15.1ff).<sup>706</sup>

Thus Colossians does not present baptism as an alternative to circumcision, but baptism as a burial with Christ is linked with circumcision as a metaphor for Christ’s death.

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<sup>703</sup>Noting that in the close parallel of Romans 6.4 Paul does not associate resurrection and baptism,

<sup>704</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 160–61. O’Brien makes an argument similar to that of Dunn, noting that the theme of the passage is being “in Christ,” and that Eph 2.6 also sets the language of being “with” Christ in juxtaposition to language of being “in Christ.” Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 119. Wilson, on the other hand, sees an incongruity between the juxtaposition of “in him” and “with him,” and also comments that on such a reading the prepositional phrase “buried with him in baptism” seems awkwardly tagged on. Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 206. See also Sumney, *Colossians*, 139.

<sup>705</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 159.

<sup>706</sup>Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 368.

## Water and Spirit in John 3.5

Jesus answered, Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

Barth notes that John 3.5 is the one New Testament saying that relates baptism “to what might be called individual regeneration as distinct from the universal *παλιγγενεσία* of Mat. 19.28 (and Tit. 3.5).”<sup>707</sup> Having explained to Nicodemus that seeing and entering the kingdom of God is an event which “can be expected and effected only from above, from God,” Jesus responds to Nicodemus’ question about this “birth from above” with a second saying about being born, this time of water and spirit.<sup>708</sup> Barth notes that the terms water and spirit could later be reduced to one (born of the spirit, 3.6, 8) and so are probably not two distinct events before suggesting three possible ways of relating the two: The reduction of the terms water and Spirit to just Spirit could be understood to imply that “that which the water does is identical with that which the Spirit does,” or it could mean that the that “there is a secondary and instrumental operation of water and a primary operation of Spirit,” or that “the work of the Spirit is symbolically revealed” in the water.<sup>709</sup>

Acknowledging that these three options were available in the contemporary religious world, Barth suggests an alternative. He notes that the formula “born of water and Spirit” is “one of the many pairs-in-tension” which are characteristic of the Gospel of John, and suggests that in each case there is “a critical synthesis ... in which the second member totally explains the first, absorbs it, and thus completely replaces it.” As such a synthesis, Spirit explains and ultimately replaces water: “What the ‘water’ is by which a man is born from above is explained wholly and exclusively by ‘Spirit.’ In the function here ascribed to it there is no water at all outside or alongside the Spirit.” In the birth from above, “no water can supplement the Spirit, no water can mediate the Spirit even as a secondary cause, no water can reveal the Spirit. Water is defined in

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<sup>707</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 120.

<sup>708</sup>Barth rejects the suggestion of Bultmann and others that “water” a later ecclesial redaction, noting that “this removes the difficulty, but it perhaps sets aside as well the true point of the verse. It has no textual support.” Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 120.

<sup>709</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 120.

this function solely by Spirit” Barth observes that such a dynamically critical synthesis explains why 3.6 and 3.8 speak only of Spirit rather than water and Spirit, water having “been rendered superfluous by the synthesis in v.5.”<sup>710</sup>

John Colwell identifies John 3.5-6 as both the strongest and the most contested New Testament witness to a sacramental understanding of baptism. He notes that the mention of flesh giving birth to flesh in 3.6 has led some to suggest that a birth of water refers to physical birth so that in this text Jesus is clarifying that physical birth is insufficient for entering the Kingdom. However, in light of the “clear eschatological (and sacramental) significance” of the preceding accounts of the wedding at Cana and the cleansing of the Temple, “but principally in the light of the overwhelmingly sacramental emphasis of the Gospel,” Colwell finds “this reasoning breathtakingly wooden.”<sup>711</sup> Colwell is similarly unconvinced by the suggestion that water and

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<sup>710</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 121.

<sup>711</sup>Colwell, *Promise & Presence*, 113. The interpretation of water as a reference to physical birth should perhaps not be brushed aside so quickly. For a relatively recent argument for such an understanding of John 3.5, see Tricia Gates Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John: Johannine Pneumatology in Social-Scientific Perspective*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (London: T & T Clark International, 2003), 120–22. In addition to noting the immediate contrast of fleshly and spiritual birth in 3.6, Gates Brown notes that such an interpretation accords with the overall theme of the passage (the futility of human initiative in gaining access to God’s kingdom), and accounts for its relationship to the preceding narrative of the wedding at Cana: “In 3.3[?], the author intends ‘water’ to symbolize a manner of birth that contrasts with spiritual birth, for the latter replaces the former as the prerequisite for entrance into God’s kingdom just as the water of purification contrasts with the abundant wine of the messianic age (2.1-11), and is replaced by it.” Gates Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John*, 122. While Donald Carson has argued that water was not associated with birth in ancient sources, Gates Brown notes that Ben Witherington has countered this argument. Gates Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John*, 121. See Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 191; Ben Witherington, “The Waters of Birth: John 3.5 and 1 John 5.6–8,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 155–58. Michaels grants that water is a possible but not obvious metaphor for physical birth. J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 183. Another argument against understanding 3.5 as including a reference to physical birth is that both water and spirit are governed by a single preposition: there is one birth ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος. See Morgan-Wynne, “References to Baptism in the Fourth Gospel,” 122; Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 184. Gates Brown counters that this grammatical argument is not decisive, appealing to a similar construction in 1 Jn 5.6 where Jesus is described as coming by water and blood: “The phrase ‘water and blood’ (5.6a) is likewise anarthrous (ie. both components of the phrase are governed by the preposition *di*), yet the phrase seems to express contrast rather than unity, especially in light of its context... In the verse ‘blood’ implies something more than just water. The thrust of the overall verse expresses the need to acknowledge that Jesus came by blood *in addition to* water.” Similarly, water and Spirit. Gates Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John*, 120 n.88.

Spirit refer to two kinds of baptism, i.e. that Jesus is “clarifying that water baptism, of itself, is insufficient; a separate and distinct baptism with the Spirit must occur.” He suggest that “a more simple reading of the text is that to be ‘born again’.... is to be born of water and Spirit ... that to be born of water and Spirit are inextricably linked, that the significance of the former is the reality of the latter.”<sup>712</sup>

Contrary to Colwell’s assertion, however, the “sacramental character” of John’s Gospel continues to be debated.<sup>713</sup> Donald Carson, for example, suggests that if the fourth evangelist had great interest in sacraments, “it is surpassingly strange that he fails to make explicit connections, neglecting even to mention the institution of the Lord’s supper.”<sup>714</sup> Commenting on John 3.5, Carson notes that

if water=baptism is so important for entering the kingdom, it is surprising that the rest of the discussion never mentions it again: the entire focus is on the work of the Spirit (v. 8), the work of the Son (vv 14-15), the work of God himself (vv 16-17), and the place of faith (vv 15-16). The analogy between the mysterious wind and the sovereign work of the Spirit (v. 8) becomes very strange if Spirit-birth is tied so firmly to baptism... The Spirit plays a powerful role in John 14-16; 20.22, but there is no hint of baptism.

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<sup>712</sup>Colwell, *Promise & Presence*, 113. Morgan-Wynn notes that the majority view John 3.5 as a reference to Christian baptism, observing that for Hartman this is so evident that it needs no discussion. Morgan-Wynne, “References to Baptism in the Fourth Gospel,” 124. See Hartman, *Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*. Admitting that John 3.5 is a baptismal text only raises the question of what the relationship is between water and Spirit. Raymond Brown identifies identification, subordination and coordination as possibilities before concluding: “Accepting ‘water’ at its face value, we do not think there is enough evidence in the Gospel itself to determine the relation between begetting of water and begetting of Spirit on the level of sacramental interpretation.” Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 144.

<sup>713</sup>Bryan Spinks notes that “some New Testament Scholars believe that St John’s Gospel is anti-sacramental, and thus find little of significance on baptism in it. Others argue that allusions to the sacraments abound throughout the Gospel. R.E. Brown took what seems to be the middle view, suggesting that we have to distinguish between the meaning of passages in their primary redaction, and the various resonances for readers of the final redaction.” Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals*, 6.

<sup>714</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 192.



Moreover the allusions to Jesus' baptismal activity (3.22; 4.1), far from fostering sacramentalism, explicitly divert attention elsewhere (*cf.* notes on 3.25-26; 4.2; 6.22ff). The conjunction of water and Spirit in 1.26, 33 is no support for this position, as there the two are contrasted, whereas in 3.5 they are co-ordinated.<sup>715</sup>

While admitting the possibility of a secondary allusion to baptism, in view of the evidence that points away from a baptismal reference for John 3.5, Carson suggests that the identification of John 3.5 as a baptismal text “seems to rest on an unarticulated prejudice that every mention of water evoked instant recognition, in the minds of first-century readers, that the real reference was to baptism, but is it very doubtful that this prejudice can be sustained by the sources.”<sup>716</sup>

Instead Carson suggests that the language of water and Spirit in John 3.5 should be understood in light of Old Testament, where water and spirit are used both “to signify cleansing from impurity” and “to depict the transformation of the heart that will enable people to follow God wholly.”<sup>717</sup> In light of Old Testament expectation, Carson argues that John 3.5 refers to the impartation of God's Spirit bringing about “a new begetting, a new birth that cleanses and renews, the

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<sup>715</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 192. Similarly, Morgan-Wynne suggests that a sacramental understanding of John 3.5 is in danger of conflicting with the focus of the narrative, this being that new birth is something that only God brings about, concluding that “Baptism is *not* the main theme, and the linguistic fact that water is only mentioned at 3.5 confirms this.” Morgan-Wynne, “References to Baptism in the Fourth Gospel,” 124. Zane Hodges also makes a similar this argument, observing that “if the fourth Evangelist really *did* connect the waters of baptism in some way with the experience of new birth, it is nothing short of astounding that he has everywhere neglected the opportunity to say this directly... No one could possibly read this Gospel and miss the transparent fact that faith is absolutely indispensable to the acquisition of eternal life. But if the reader is to deduce that baptism is also essential for this - or even important! - he can only do so by catching a less than totally obvious reference to it in 3.5. No competent writer who wishes to make his basic ideas clear ever does this sort of thing. It is accordingly in the highest degree improbable that the author of the Fourth Gospel actually saw baptism as an integral part of the experience of new birth.” Zane C. Hodges, “Water and Spirit-John 3:5,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July-September 1978, 208–09. Hodges also cites James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 189, 190.

<sup>716</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 192. Fergusson also notes the tendency of some to see “symbolic reference to baptism in the fourth Gospel's frequent mention of water” and suggests that Beasley-Murray has demonstrated the exegetical problems with this. Fergusson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 142. See Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*.

<sup>717</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 195.

eschatological cleansing and renewal promised by the Old Testament prophets.”<sup>718</sup> Noting that Jesus identifies Nicodemus as a “teacher of Israel” who would be familiar with these Old Testament texts, Carson suggests that in John 3 “both the mysteriousness and the undeniable power of the Spirit of God are displayed in the Scriptures to which Nicodemus had devoted so many years of study.”<sup>719</sup>

Though Carson’s reading does not necessarily support Barth’s claim that water and Spirit in John 3 are part of a broader pattern of “pairs-in-tension” in John’s gospel, it does support Barth’s larger contention that what is at issue in John 3 is the work of the Spirit in the beginning of new life. J. Ramsey Michaels also supports such an understanding of this text, arguing that “both water and Spirit mean ‘life’ in the Gospel of John” so that

the birth from “water and Spirit” means the beginning of new life “from above,” or what this Gospel calls “eternal life” (*zoe aionion*)... “Born of water and Spirit,” therefore, becomes simply the writers way of defining “the kingdom of God” as “life” or “eternal life,” with the effect of actually *replacing* “kingdom of God” with “life” (the term “kingdom of God” never occurs again in the Gospel of John).<sup>720</sup>

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<sup>718</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 195.

<sup>719</sup>Carson suggests that in John 3 Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus of an event that is like Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of the dry bones: “There God’s breath/Spirit.. comes upon the valley of dry bones and the dry bones are revived; God’s people come to life. Thus it is with everyone born of the Spirit: they have their ‘origin and destiny in the unesen God’ (Fenton, p.54), not in ‘human decision or a husband’s will’, for they are ‘born of God’ (1.13).” Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 198 John McHugh similarly argues that Old Testament prophetic texts such as Ezekiel 11.16-20 and Jeremiah 31.31-34 “are fully adequate to account for the phrase *reborn of water and spirit*, especially since Ezekiel’s influence will be seen again in Jn 4 (compare Ezek 16.44-55). John, like Ezekiel, dwells not on past punishment, but on the positive gifts of the Spirit and of the New Temple.” John F. McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1–4* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009), 228.

<sup>720</sup>Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 185 See also Hodges, “Water and Spirit-John 3:5,” 214.

## Prayer and Conscience in 1 Peter 3.21

And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you - not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

While 1 Peter 3.21 is not one of the texts which Barth addresses as normally used to support a sacramental understanding of baptism, a brief discussion is appropriate in view of the fact that he identifies it as a particularly significant text, “a description of baptism not unlike a definition.”<sup>721</sup> Barth understands this text to be describing baptism as prayer or “request of God for a good conscience,” arguing that here conscience should be understood as “a being in harmony with God.”

A number of Biblical scholars confirm Barth’s judgment that 1 Peter 3.21 is important as a New Testament definition of baptism, John Elliott citing Dunn’s judgment that 1 Peter 3.21 is “the nearest approach to a definition [of baptism] that the NT affords.”<sup>722</sup> There is similar support for Barth’s interpretation of *συνειδήσεως* (conscience) as an awareness of oneself before God rather than in the sense of moral judgment.<sup>723</sup> There is less support, however, for Barth’s interpretation of *ἐπερώτημα* as “prayer” or “request.” Peter Davids notes that if *ἐπερώτημα* is understood in light of its verbal root it could be translated as “request” but argues that an interpretation of *ἐπερώτημα* as “pledge” or “formal answer to questions placed by another” is more probable, citing the presence of such pledges in Jewish initiation practices and noting that there are hints of such questioning present in other New Testament passages (Acts 8.37; Tim 6.12).<sup>724</sup> Scholars

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<sup>721</sup>Karl Barth, *CD IV/4*, 211.

<sup>722</sup>John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 681, citing James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 219.

<sup>723</sup>John E. Colwell, “Baptism, Conscience and the Resurrection: A Reappraisal of 1 Peter 3.21,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Essays in Honour of R.E.O. White*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 214 See also Lewis R Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 114 and John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 680.

<sup>724</sup>Peter.H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 144–45. John Elliott excludes “prayer” on the basis that “this would introduce a view of baptism (as supplication to God).

who agree with one another that *ἐπερώτημα* should be understood as “pledge” debate whether baptism is a pledge *for* a good conscience (Elliot, Donelson) or a pledges that proceeds *from* a good conscience (Davids).<sup>725</sup>

John Colwell, however, supports Barth’s interpretation of *ἐπερώτημα* as “prayer,” arguing that “while there may be extra-biblical historical reasons for interpreting the word in terms of contractual pledge, there are certainly theological reasons for resisting such an interpretation.”<sup>726</sup>

One of the difficulties with this text is that *ἐπερώτημα* is a *hapax legomenon*, and, as Colwell notes, “when the word in question appears here and nowhere else in the New Testament, linguistic arguments should proceed with great caution.”<sup>727</sup> Furthermore, it should be noted that the alternative understanding of baptism as “pledge” or “promise” does not undermine Barth’s ethical interpretation of baptism; if anything it points to a stronger affirmation of baptism as an ethical act. As Michaels points out, “whether Peter is characterizing Christian baptism as an ‘appeal’ or as a ‘pledge,’ he clearly views it as an act directed from human beings toward God ... not [as] God’s act toward them.”<sup>728</sup>

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John H. Elliott, *I Peter*, 680. Similarly, Lewis Donelson argues in favour of “pledge” on theological terms, suggesting that “the idea of baptism as a prayer or request to God is difficult to comprehend in the theology of early Christianity, while the notion of baptism as a plege to God fits perfectly with standard early Christian language.” Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude*, 110.

<sup>725</sup>John H. Elliott, *I Peter*, 680; Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude*, 114; Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 145.

<sup>726</sup>Colwell, *Promise & Presence*, 114–15 See Colwell, “Baptism, Conscience and the Resurrection,” 222–23.

<sup>727</sup>Colwell, *Promise & Presence*, 114.

<sup>728</sup>Michaels notes that it is *συνειδήσεως* that is in the emphatic position in the sentence with the result that the precise meaning of *ἐπερώτημα* is less crucial. J. Ramsey Michaels, *I Peter*, Word Biblical Commentaries (Waco: Word Books, 1988), 217.

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