

Introductions by JOHN WITVLIET
and NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF

Historical Foundations of Worship

Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Perspectives

Edited by Melanie C. Ross and Mark A. Lamport





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Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Melanie C. Ross and Mark A. Lamport, Historical Foundations of Worship
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Preface

Melanie C. Ross and Mark A. Lamport

The Worship Foundations textbook series is designed as a set of accessible yet focused studies on theological and historical liturgical themes. *Historical Foundations of Worship*, the second book in the series, is divided into five parts. Early chapters address liturgical developments all Christians held in common: the source of the stream before the traditions split into separate tributaries. The remaining sections survey Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestant developments that include Reformation traditions, evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism.

Although each chapter is written by a different author, this volume is united by a cluster of shared themes concerning the historical study of liturgy. The first is a word of caution against a call for repristination: the return to some perceived earlier historical ideal. Liturgical rites and practices of earlier centuries may provide “sources for inspiration, but there is no golden age that can be revived for the present,” notes Bryan Spinks. And L. Edward Phillips concurs: while it may be appropriate to look to the early church for inspiration, we must “avoid assigning too much authority to an ancient practice simply because it is ancient.” The reason for this, he explains, is that the truth is always messy and diverse. “Even though we claim to be the early Christians’ spiritual descendants,” we are separated from the early Christians by time and culture, “trying to make sense of the reports of witnesses that we only partly understand.”

At the same time, a second recurring theme is the importance of learning from those who have gone before. Joanne Pierce suggests that the Middle Ages

offer a balance in liturgy and worship to modern Christians who “get lost in a sea of words and a clamor of noise. There is a need to rediscover the value of silence and the experience of transcendence/mystery.” Reflecting on John Calvin’s legacy, Martin Tel observes, “In a culture fixated on #TheNextIdol, a religious iconoclast is an unlikely go-to conversation partner. But, with a little imagination, it is possible to recognize meaningful similarities between the landscape of worship arts today and that of Calvin’s sixteenth century.” The reader is especially encouraged to study the “Practical Implications for Worship” section at the end of each chapter for more of these kinds of connective threads.

A third recurring theme is that the study of liturgical history must encompass more than an analysis of worship texts. As Valerie Rempel reminds us, not all Christian traditions center their worship on recurring texts: “There is no common liturgy that unites Anabaptist and Mennonite communities of faith.” J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu guides us to the reflection that Pentecostal praise is “direct, spontaneous and simple,” free from “dependence on such liturgical resources as prayer-books and hymn-books.” John Baldovin points out that even for those communities that do share common liturgy, the experience of Christian worship “is intimately related to the social and cultural spirit of any given age. . . . We neglect the critical history of worship at our peril.” In a similar vein, Joris Geldhof stresses the importance of making bridges “between the multiple shapes and forms and customs of the church’s liturgy, on the one hand, and the sociocultural environments where these celebrations happen, on the other.” Worship is not a disembodied activity but rather one that, in Craig Satterlee’s words, always “takes place in particular assemblies within particular contexts.”

Finally, the study of the past may yield surprises and insights that challenge today’s status quo. “It is not enough to assume that ‘this is the way we’ve always done it,’” writes Jennifer Davidson. “What a deceptively authoritative phrase that can be, especially when it comes to worship.” Indeed, as Nina Glibetić observes in her survey of Eastern Orthodoxy, “reverence toward liturgical tradition sometimes obstructs a popular appreciation for just how much historical development has occurred.”

May the chapters that follow serve as both windows (examinations of the unfamiliar) and mirrors (reflections of your own practices and experiences). Echoing Andrew McGowan, we hope that the insights and ecumenical ethos of each author helps “place the historic Christian community itself firmly before us, not merely as an interesting source but as a living reality, whose abiding relevance counters glib comparisons between past tradition and modern sensibility.”

Series Introduction

Nicholas Wolterstorff

The Structure of Christian Worship

When we participate in Christian communal worship, we engage in a distinct form of activity that I shall call *scripted*. The diverse historical streams of worship, which the writers in this volume identify and analyze, are the result of different communities of Christians following different liturgical scripts—and of following their particular scripts in different ways.

Let me introduce what I mean by *scripts* and *scripted activity* with an example from music. Suppose that you and three of your friends decide to play one of Beethoven's string quartets—Quartet no. 12, opus 127, let us say. To make that decision is to decide that you will together follow a certain set of prescriptions for a correct performance of that work. If you faithfully follow those prescriptions, you have played the work correctly; if not, you have played it incorrectly—or, if you diverge too widely from the prescriptions, you have not played it at all. Of course, a performance can be correct without being a good performance, and some good performances are incorrect at certain points.

Though Beethoven's score for his opus 127 specifies prescriptions for correct performances of the work, it does not specify all of them. It could not possibly specify all of them—matters of legato, for example, of bowing, of tremolo. The additional prescriptions are implicit in the modern Western traditions of string-instrument playing. It's the *total* set of prescriptions for

a correct performance that I call the *script*—those notated in the score plus those implicit in the relevant performance practice.

Let me highlight the ontological distinctions that I have employed in these remarks. There is the *work*, Beethoven's Quartet no. 12. Since it can be multiply performed, it's a universal. There is the *performance* of the work by you and your friends at a given time and place. There is the *score* for the work, which contains a good many of the prescriptions for a correct performance of the work. And there is what I call the *script*, which is the entire set of prescriptions for a correct performance: those specified in the score plus those implicit in the performance tradition. Lots of room for mistakes!

When participating together in the worship of God, we willingly surrender a portion of our autonomy for the duration. When we assemble to worship God, we do not each do our own thing but together submit to a script, the decisive clue to the fact that we are submitting to a script being that what we do can be judged in terms of correct and incorrect, not just in terms of better and worse. I may think that a different hymn would have been better for opening the service on this particular Sunday morning, but I limit my autonomy for the time being and join everybody else in singing the prescribed hymn. Of course, not everything that we do, or how we do it, is prescribed. How loudly we sing the hymns is usually a matter of personal choice.

How do the people know what is prescribed? In some worship traditions—Orthodox, Catholic, and Episcopal, for example—a great deal of what is prescribed is specified in texts and hymnals that the worshipers follow. In other worship traditions—Pentecostal, for example—a great deal of what is prescribed is announced by the worship leader. But in every case, it will be a combination of these two. And in no case do the prescriptions specified by the texts, plus those specified by the worship leader, constitute the totality of the prescriptions; many are implicit in the worship tradition of that particular congregation.

The ontological distinctions that I employed when discussing my musical example obviously have close parallels in Christian communal worship. For every worship service, there is a *script* specifying things to be done—words to be uttered, songs to be sung, movements to be made, and so on. By reference to the script, worshipers act correctly or incorrectly.

The counterpart to the musical *score* is the liturgical text, if there is one, and the hymnal. The counterpart to the musical *work* is the sequence of actions performed when the worshipers faithfully follow the script. This is a universal; it can, in principle, be performed many times. The counterpart to the musical *performance* is, of course, what the worshipers actually do on a particular occasion.

This is a good point to introduce the discussion concerning what it is that the term “liturgy” refers to that I promised in my introduction to the first book in this series. When writers speak of *liturgy*, or of *liturgies* (plural) and a *liturgy* (singular), what are they referring to? Among the ontologically distinct types of things that I identified in the discussion above, which do they have in mind? The answer is that different writers have different things in mind, and the same writer may have different things in mind in different passages.

As I noted in my introduction to the preceding volume, participants in the Liturgical Movement of the early twentieth century used the term to refer to what the people do under the direction of their leaders—that is, to liturgical enactments. Liturgy, so understood, is the counterpart, in worship, to a musical performance.

By contrast, when writers use the term “Catholic liturgy,” what they usually have in mind is the prescriptions for worship specified in the Catholic missal, and when they use the term “Episcopal liturgy,” what they usually have in mind is the prescriptions for worship specified in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Liturgy, so understood, is like the score for a musical work—except that, since these texts don’t specify the hymns for the day, they are considerably more incomplete than most musical scores. It’s because Pentecostals don’t have anything like such books that they often declare themselves to be nonliturgical.

In my own writing on these matters, I have quite often spoken of *enacting* the liturgy.¹ Liturgy, so understood, is the counterpart of the musical *work*. We enact the liturgical *work* by following the liturgical *script*, thereby producing a liturgical *enactment*.

The moral is that when a writer uses the term “liturgy,” one has to judge from the context which sort of entity he or she is referring to. Usually it will be rather easy to tell, and sometimes it won’t make any difference.

For the assembled people to enact the liturgy for the day, different members have to fill different roles. There’s the role of the people, the role of presiding minister or priest, the role of Scripture reader, the role of preacher, the role of leader of the prayers, the role of musical instrumentalist(s), and so on. Often the same person fills several of these roles.

It is this phenomenon of different roles being filled by different members of the assembly that has led a good many writers on these matters to compare enacting a liturgy to performing a drama. The similarity is indeed striking. But there is also a decisive difference. In the performance of a drama, the members of the cast play the roles of *fictional characters*. When they speak,

1. I have refrained from speaking of *performing* the liturgy because of the misleading connotations of the term.

they do not speak in their own voice but in the voice of the character they are playing. By contrast, when we together enact the liturgy for the day, we do not play the roles of fictional characters but speak in our own voice. In the Confession, *I* confess *my* sins; I do not play the role of a *fictional character* who confesses *his* sins. A liturgical enactment, when well done, will have a strong dramatic quality. But it is not the performance of a drama.

It is by all together submitting ourselves to following the liturgical script that we *together* enact the liturgy; if there were not a script that we all submitted to following, we could not enact the liturgy *together*. Let me briefly point to another way in which we limit our autonomy in order to enact the liturgy *together*.

Not only do we submit to the script in our speaking, our singing, our bodily motions. We also adjust our speaking, our singing, our bodily motions to those of our fellow worshipers. I might prefer that the hymn be sung more slowly. No matter. I adjust my pace to that of the instrumentalists and my fellow congregants. This phenomenon of adjusting what one is doing to what those around one are doing is especially familiar to those who have sung in a choir or played an instrument in an ensemble.

A point that I have several times alluded to but not highlighted is the following. All Christian liturgies originate in the worship practices of the early church, of which we get some indications in the letters of the New Testament. But over time different liturgical scripts emerged within different sections of the church, along with different ways of communicating the script for a given Sunday—by texts, by announcements, on a screen—so that now we can identify distinct liturgical traditions and practices: Coptic, Eastern Orthodox, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and so on. This present volume is devoted to analyzing some of these script-shaped liturgical traditions and practices.

In concluding this section, let me note that when Christians assemble to enact their liturgy, almost always the actions they perform include actions that are not, strictly speaking, actions of worship. Confessing to God that we have wronged God is not adoration of God, nor is petitioning God. The justification for nonetheless speaking of the enactment of a liturgy as a *worship* service is that worship is the all-embracing context. To call the entirety of the liturgical enactment a “worship service” is to use the term “worship” as a synecdoche: a part is used to stand for the whole.

Christian Liturgy and Christian Scripture

In this introduction I have devoted my discussion thus far to identifying a fundamental structural feature of Christian communal worship—namely,

when Christians assemble to worship God, they surrender part of their autonomy for the time being so as together to engage in the scripted activity of worshipping God. Let me close our discussion by pointing to a fundamental and pervasive feature of the *content* of Christian worship. Christian liturgy is suffused with Christian Scripture.

This suffusion takes a number of distinct forms. The most obvious form is that in most Christian liturgical enactments, one or more passages from Scripture are read and a sermon or homily is delivered based on those passages. If one or more of the passages read is a narrative, as it often is, the reading amounts to a retelling of that part of the biblical story. The retelling of some part of the biblical story is not confined to the reading of Scripture, however. It also occurs when the minister retells some part of the story in their own words, or in words prescribed by the script. The most obvious example of this last is the retelling of a part of the biblical story in the eucharistic prayer.

Not only are Christian liturgical enactments replete with retellings of parts of the biblical story, they are also replete with repetitions of episodes that the biblical stories narrate. The people praise God, just as people in the biblical narratives praised God; they intercede with God, just as people in the biblical narratives interceded with God. Sometimes, in their praise or intercession, the people repeat the very words used by persons in the biblical narrative. This is most obvious when the people pray the Lord's Prayer.

A central component in traditional Christian liturgical enactments is the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist. Jesus himself, in his institution of the Supper, employed the fundamental category for understanding what is taking place when we celebrate the Supper: we imitate what Jesus and his disciples did in that last supper of our Lord as a *memorial* or *remembrance* of him.

The idea of doing something *as a memorial* or *as a remembrance* of some person or event in the biblical narrative has application beyond our celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is, for example, the basic category for understanding the church's celebration of the various seasons of the church year. Our celebration of Christmas is a memorial or remembrance of Christ's birth; our celebration of Good Friday is a memorial or remembrance of Christ's crucifixion; our celebration of Easter is a memorial or remembrance of Christ's resurrection. And so forth.

We could identify yet other ways in which Christian Scripture is suffused in Christian liturgical enactments. For example, the washing of feet on Maundy Thursday is a *reenactment* of Christ's washing of the feet of his disciples. But enough has been said to make my point.

Many have tried to capture, with a single concept, the many and diverse ways in which Christian Scripture suffuses Christian liturgies. The concepts most commonly used for this purpose are *enactment* and *reenactment*. It is often said that by participating in the liturgy we *enact*, or *reenact*, “the story of salvation,” or “the biblical narrative,” or “the redemptive work of Christ.” No doubt something like this fits some of the ways in which Scripture suffuses Christian liturgies, but not all. It doesn’t fit, for example, praying the Psalms. Content with not having a concept that fits all the cases, we should note and celebrate the diverse ways in which Christian Scripture suffuses Christian liturgies.

Introduction

John Witvliet

As we engage with the subject matter of this volume, we are invited into a pilgrimage through the history of Christian worship. Whether we are paging through a book of family photos or absorbed in a historical documentary, museum exhibit, or a book like this, we have a choice to make about whether we will take in the information being offered as tourists or as pilgrims. Are we primarily interested in a mere diversion? Or are we seeking something deeper, open to learning that is transformative, soul-engaging, and, thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, profoundly sanctifying?

The way of the pilgrim begins in love—as we turn from self-absorption toward deep attentiveness toward neighbors near and far. In nearly every village, neighborhood, and social media network, each of us encounters Christians who worship quite differently than we do, singing different songs with different instruments or no instruments at all, presenting public Bible readings according to starkly different reading plans, preaching and praying with quite different sensibilities about how lengthy and formal these practices should be, practicing baptism and the Lord’s Supper with quite different gestures, postures, and explanatory frameworks. As a Protestant Christian, I love my Catholic and Orthodox neighbors when I learn about the feast days and baptismal celebrations that are so central to their sense of identity in Christ. I love my Pentecostal neighbors when I learn the story behind a heartsong that they carry with them into moments of challenge and stress. One powerful motivation for studying the history of worship is to better know

and understand people whom God has placed in our lives from traditions quite different from our own.

When we begin to search for the stories behind the cherished practices of our neighbors, we are quickly confronted by the stunning pluriformity of liturgical practices that have developed in multitudes of denominations across thousands of distinct subcultures across hundreds of years. The mathematics are staggering: imagine what would be required for us to deeply learn the inner dynamics of twenty or thirty Christian practices across even the two hundred more populated denominations that have emerged across eighty generations in what today are two hundred or so countries. As if this isn't wondrous enough, we then discover that throughout these eighty generations, so many influential figures were themselves amateur (or professional) historians, inviting us to pay attention to how they studied history and employed historical reasoning in their discernment. This can become challenging to manage as we become aware, for example, of how nineteenth- and twentieth-century liturgical reforms were based on a certain understanding of how the sixteenth-century reformers drew on fourth-century liturgical sources and their roots in ancient biblical metaphors and narratives! All of it invites us to see ourselves in relation to a long procession of historical inquirers—going way back to the remarkable acts of historical meaning-making we see on display in so many Old Testament historical books and in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.

What begins in an act of love toward a neighbor ends in wonder and astonishment and the breadth and diversity of Christ's body, the pluriformity of Christian worship practices. The fact that we can even contemplate this pluriformity is a gift. What remarkable access we have today to artifacts, archaeological sites, and other historical documents from across the range of Christian traditions. In each of the last eight generations, serious students of worship have been graced to live through periods of groundbreaking paradigm shifts in the study of liturgical history, thanks to archaeological discoveries, improved scholarly editions of key primary sources, and insightful analytic studies of any number of sources and time periods. In nearly every topic area covered in doctoral research seminars a generation ago, there are now new shelves full of books and rich online repositories of sources that offer new insights. As we learn to see each individual source, topic, and time period in light of all of this work, we also find that our view of the entire landscape of liturgical history changes. Given the rapid expansion of all this knowledge, it seems likely that we have only begun to clarify what this means for our vision of Christianity as a whole and our place in it. A book like this is a significant resource to assist with this undertaking, offering us at once a view of the whole

and deep insight into particular practices and traditions from scholars who are sympathetic to their subject, with expertise in some of the many specialties related to the study of the complexities of Christian liturgical practices. As you read this book, give thanks to God for the historians, archaeologists, editors, librarians, copyists, historical preservationists, collectors and curators, risk-taking interpreters, and pastoral pedagogues whose labors are bearing fruit as we learn together.

Not infrequently, our forays into all these sources will not only inspire us but also unsettle us as we discover communities, traditions, and time periods filled with conflict, mixed motives, disruption, and variance in practice that call into question so many of our most cherished assumptions. Deep, pilgrimlike engagement with this material challenges us to set aside sentimental history that idealizes heroes, avoiding inconvenient facts about their vices, as well as punitive history that refuses to appreciate redemptive, life-giving episodes in even crassly fallen people. Deep, pilgrimlike engagement with this material invites us to be alert to historical interpretations that are wielded as instruments of coercion—excusing sin and twisting truth. We also become alert to the gift of prophetic interpretations that challenge these destructive ones, telling more of the truth, and forming us to be at once more humble and more courageous as we interpret the histories that shape us. To choose only one of thousands of potential examples, if slaveholders of European descent tried to evangelize chattel slaves but then withheld baptism from them, naming that hypocrisy creates a context in which justice and reconciliation can be pursued.

All of that leads us back into disciplines of ecclesial love, as we seek to honor the deepest desire expressed in Jesus's high priestly prayer that his followers would be one unified body (John 17; Eph. 4). It takes practice to learn to see believers in a vastly different cultural and historical context from our own not just as objects of study but rather as siblings in Jesus—kin in Christ. The journey is humbling and ennobling, unsettling and yet deeply grounding. Almost always, we are led toward greater caution as we consider the supposed strengths of our own traditions, greater charity as we listen in on the foibles and glories of our siblings, and greater courage for facing our own inadequacies. Our capacity to do this well depends in large measure on our awareness of how complex the interactions among Christian traditions can be. At times, the distinct Christian traditions described in this volume interact in mutually enriching ways, sharing insights, approaches, and artworks of many kinds. At other times, Christian traditions set themselves up over against others, reacting against, challenging, and even decrying developments in other parts of the body of Christ. Whereas some differences across Christian traditions

are a matter of difference in patterns of emphases, others offer a stubbornly profound contrast in the most basic forms of worship.

None of us approach all this complexity from a neutral or perfectly objective point of view. And yet we can, I'm convinced, make progress in our capacity not only to acknowledge more historical data but also to see deeply into both the virtues and the vices of a given approach or time period, including our own. As a teacher of liturgical history, I have observed two things that deeply enhance this pilgrimlike learning. First, I have increasingly noticed how beautifully students respond to an invitation to study the history of worship in search of "charisms"—learning to look for Holy Spirit-given gifts that edify, encourage, and chasten the body of Christ. When we engage history in search of "successes," we set our sights too low. When we seek to identify charisms, we find ourselves looking deeper, noticing under-the-surface dynamics, celebrating fruits of the Spirit of a given historical figure that may not be apparent during their lifetime.

Second, I have learned how essential it is to study this material, whenever possible, in a collaborative context with people who have different temperaments, cultural backgrounds, and denominational histories. For many years I have taught some students from traditions with quite fixed and stable liturgical practices and many others from traditions with a high degree of flexibility, variability, and even risk-taking in their liturgical practices. Each of these broad groups has within them students motivated by different concerns. Many of my students from more fixed and stable traditions study history to discover ways that even seemingly unbending, inflexible practices have adapted and changed subtly over time. Others study history in order to explain, defend, and protect these practices. Many of my students from traditions with more variability study history in order to seek inspiration for next week's innovation or—conversely—to discover something more stable and enduring than they have known. These complex crosscurrents of motivation can make a class on the history of worship dynamic and challenging, creating conditions for mutual accountability as we discern together what is good, true, and beautiful in this unfolding story. So much of the richest learning happens when we notice how other people react to the same material. Any given student may initially be disengaged as they encounter an ancient Christian mosaic, a medieval monastic prayer book, a Reformation baptism and eucharistic liturgy, or an influential modern projection or sound technology—until they see how that same artifact excites or troubles a friend. Pilgrimage is so often enhanced in good company.

Ultimately, some of us who study this material will do so in order to discern what is best in our congregations and ministries, and for our own personal

churchgoing decisions. We will act on the insights we gain here. In this regard, I have discovered two key insights from my students. When thinking about our own communities in light of our historical study, seek both to diagnose and to enrich. Our pilgrimages in the history of Christian worship will help us diagnose gaps. Studying an ancient lectionary may help some of us see how anemic some patterns of Bible reading are today or to discover strengths in how our traditions may have rebalanced our scriptural diets over time. Our pilgrimages also enrich our imagination for what is possible. A contemporary songwriter who prayerfully reviews a nineteenth-century hymnal will discover a treasure trove of metaphors and images. Whether we gain insight or inspiration, each encounter challenges us to grow in our capacity to think analogously—to discern the points of both continuity and discontinuity between a given cultural context and time period and our own. We gain insight for shaping worship services for the people we serve, as well as for nurturing the people we serve for the services we shape.

In and through all of this, our engagement with liturgical history truly comes into its own when it trains us to behold the goodness and glory of the triune God. One of the most ancient and enduring liturgical impulses across Christian traditions is to learn to engage in liturgical practices as occasions to “lift up our hearts,” to “set our minds on things above” (see Col. 3:2), to behold the goodness and glory of God. The term “worship” is so frequently used as a synecdoche to title particular liturgies in some traditions and the field of liturgical studies in others precisely because doxology is a foundational spiritual practice. While there is great wisdom in being measured and cautious when speaking of the Holy One, it would be tragic if our engagement with liturgical history left us with little room for doxology. At its best, studying liturgical history forms us for beholding the goodness of the Lord. If I encounter a long historical psalm or eucharistic prayer and am turned off by its length, I will miss its beauty. But if I study its history and discover the profound ways that each unfolds the grand metanarrative of God’s saving acts in history, then I am better able to participate in that unfolding text with attention on God and not the prayer’s length. At its best, liturgical history invites us to listen in on testimonies of God’s saints across the centuries who worshiped in ancient temples, obscure homes and villas, grand cathedrals, makeshift chapels, and on terrifying battlefields, saying,

I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name. (Ps. 63:2–4)

Whereas a tourist seeks diversion, a pilgrim longs to gain new capacity to perceive truth, to express love, to be grasped by wonder, and to return all praise and thanks to God. May God's Spirit grace each reader of this book with this holy longing.



PART 1

Common Roots of Worship



Baptism

Bryan D. Spinks

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

—T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*,
The Four Quartets

Like much poetic language, the words of T. S. Eliot tease and are capable of many meanings. We may understand a beginning as a journey toward a goal, and the suggestion that the goal also makes a beginning is apropos of Christian baptism. Phillip Tovey, noting that there is an integral relationship between making disciples and baptism, has expressed it thus: “The fruit of discipleship-making is baptisms, and baptisms are a call to further disciple-making.”¹ The beginning is an end, and the end is a beginning.

Baptism and the New Testament

In Galatians, Paul writes, “For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed

1. Phillip Tovey, *Of Water and the Spirit: Mission and the Baptismal Liturgy* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury, 2015), 3.

yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:26–27), and in his Letter to the Romans he asks, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3). In these verses Paul assumes a ritual called baptism, and he assumes his readers will be familiar with the ritual. However, neither in these verses nor elsewhere in his letters does he describe the details of this ritual. Nicholas Taylor has succinctly put it this way:

Paul says little about the practice of Baptism. The only reference in the Pauline letters to specific occasions on which Baptism was administered is in 1 Corinthians 1.14, 16, which simply lists the people whom Paul had baptized in Corinth, with no further details. There is no indication as to how the rite related to the conversion of the individuals mentioned and their households; nor is there any mention of catechumenal instruction before and after Baptism. There is no liturgy described, no venue specified. These details form a part of the common knowledge shared by Paul and those to whom he wrote, and in many respects by other of the first generation of Christians also. Paul does not suggest that the occasions on which he administered Baptism were the exception rather than his usual practice, so we should not extrapolate too many generalizations from this brief reference.²

What Taylor says of Paul is true of the whole of the New Testament. To look for or to reconstruct a ritual for baptism from the New Testament writings is as misplaced as would be an attempt to construct a modern scientific manual from the creation stories of Genesis. It was simply not the purpose of the writers. Nevertheless, the New Testament is the place to begin to understand the foundational narratives of Christian baptism.

The Synoptic Gospels all attest that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan. John’s baptism was for repentance, and he proclaims that one coming after him will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Although they have differences, the Synoptic Gospels describe Jesus being baptized by John, a voice announcing him as the beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove. The Fourth Gospel does not attest that John baptized Jesus but does have the Baptist affirm that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. It is possible to see here a ritual—baptism in water, a formula, a belief that the Holy Spirit descends—and those elements are present in subsequent Christian baptismal rituals.

The formula at the baptism of Jesus stresses his unique status as the Son of God, but although Christians were and are regarded as children of God

2. Nicholas Taylor, *Paul on Baptism: Theology, Mission and Ministry in Context* (London: SCM, 2016), 102–3.

and fellow heirs with Christ, there is no evidence that the words concerning Jesus were used of Christians. In the New Testament we find two formulae, one of which later certainly became a baptismal formula. In Matthew 28:19 the disciples are to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Some scholars have stated that this is a later addition, though their claim has no manuscript support. This may well be what the Matthean community did, on the basis of the “trinitarian” dimensions of Jesus’s baptism—the Son is baptized, the Father speaks, and the Holy Spirit descends (echoing the creation narrative). Mention is made in Acts of baptizing in the name of Jesus. What is important here is that, regardless of the formula, it is a baptizing “into” (*eis* or *eipi*) the name. Given the importance of the name in the Hebrew Scriptures, at the very least baptism here is understood as being poured into the person and identity of Jesus and all that he is and represents. This is probably why Paul speaks of putting on the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27), being baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13), or being baptized into Jesus’s death and being united with him (Rom. 6).

One important distinction of Christian baptism from that of John is its pneumatological dimension, and the baptism into the name of Jesus gives a christological dimension. The New Testament writings also give other theological dimensions and themes to baptism. There is a soteriological aspect—baptism washes away sin and saves. It has an ecclesiological dimension in that it incorporates a person into the body of Christ, the church. It is a covenant and is also concerned with the coming kingdom, and so is eschatological. Other images are death and resurrection, being born again, illumination, and stripping off and putting on. Some of these were subsequently articulated in liturgical prayers and formulae in the liturgies that developed, but no liturgy contains them all, and it is probably an overload to attempt to incorporate them all into one service.

The place of faith, and what constitutes faith, is another question that the New Testament does not give an unambiguous answer to. With John’s baptism it seems that the ritual was a response to his preaching, and that also seems to be the case in Acts 2:41—an immediate response. Prior to the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, the eunuch gets instruction on a passage of Isaiah and then is baptized in the next body of water that he and Phillip spot. In Acts 16 the jailer hears the word, resulting in he and his family being baptized. This seems to have been a cultural norm. Most people belonged to a “household” and followed the lead of the head of the household.³ Some households would have contained infants, and so it should be assumed that

3. See the excellent discussion in Taylor, *Paul on Baptism*, 118–23.

they too were baptized along with other members who followed the choice of the head of the household.

The Acts of the Apostles has accounts of baptism that present different sequences or patterns of the ritual. In some there is baptism followed by the laying on of hands, which is associated with the gift of the Spirit. Some followers of the Baptist who had received only the baptism of repentance have hands laid on them to complete or transform it into Christian baptism. But with Cornelius the Spirit descends first, and baptism follows. Some scholars have attempted to see some evolutionary ritual pattern in these variations, but often they read their own presuppositions back into the texts. It is better to see these as reflecting different ritual patterns that coexisted, rather than to rearrange them into a developmental pattern.

Pre-Nicene Witnesses

Variety and different patterns and emphases are what we find in the pre-Nicene evidence. The *Didache*, a church order itself compiled from several sources, is dated by most scholars circa 80 CE, from the region of Antioch.⁴ It has close affinities with the Gospel of Matthew and seems to have originated in communities that were predominantly Jewish-Christian. Baptism is in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (cf. Matthew), but it also mentions baptism in the name of the Lord. There is a period of fasting by the candidates prior to baptism. What is significant is the permissive method of baptism—in living water (i.e., river, lake, baths, or cistern), warm or cold, or triple pouring. It is significant that in the house church at Dura-Europos (ca. 280) the place for baptism is too small for anything other than standing in shallow water and pouring. It suggests that water, not the amount and method, was the important factor. In the community known to Justin Martyr in Rome, as outlined in Justin's *First Apology* (ca. 165), the baptism of new members was done in private, away from the actual congregation—presumably for reasons of modesty. After the act of baptism, the newly baptized arrived at the assembly to join in worship with them. Justin's community gathered over public baths, and it may be that the baths were the place used for their baptisms.

Other important witnesses are the apocryphal works. There are two versions of the *Acts of Thomas*, Greek and Syriac.⁵ Although the Syriac may be the original language, the present Syriac text seems to postdate the Greek, and

4. For a recent commentary, see Shawn J. Wilhite, *The Didache: A Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019).

5. Relevant excerpts are in E. C. Whitaker and Maxwell Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 2003).

there are some differences between them. What emerges is different patterns of initiation. In the Greek text, some are by anointing with oil only. Others are by anointing with oil and baptism in water. Some accounts have an invocation of the Holy Spirit over the oil, and baptism is with the trinitarian formula. A lighted lamp after the baptism is also mentioned—possibly a symbol of illumination. The *Gospel of Philip* mentions a stripping off and putting on of garments, and it also discusses the importance of oil.⁶ Tertullian, representing North African practice circa 200, witnesses to instruction and fasting as preparation, renouncing of the devil and his pomp, possibly a blessing of the water, baptism, anointing of the head, and the laying on of hands.⁷ The cumulative evidence and witnesses illustrate differing ritual patterns across geographical areas and different Christian communities. Anointing with olive oil, either before or after the baptism, became a common element. This was part of bathing etiquette in the classical world and was regarded as having health benefits and protective qualities. Sometimes the anointing was before bathing, sometimes after, and for the wealthy it was both before and after using perfumed oil.⁸ For a faith that preached the Anointed One, on whom the Spirit alighted after his baptism—who was himself prophet, priest, and king—olive oil and perfumed oil were quickly ritualized as a sign of the Spirit and of the newly baptized being anointed heirs with Christ. It was now a spiritual protection and marked the baptized as members of the royal priesthood.

Fourth- and Fifth-Century Homilies and Liturgical Material

In the fourth century we have more information about the rites of baptism and how at least some authors understood them. We have three sets of sermons by John Chrysostom, from when he was a presbyter at Antioch; the catechetical lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem and the mystagogical lectures attributed to him (Jerusalem); the catechetical homilies of Theodore of Mopsuestia (Antioch or Mopsuestia); and homilies of Zeno of Verona and *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis* of Ambrose of Milan, both representing Italy. In addition, we have liturgical material from the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a church order (possibly by a Eunomian who did not accept that Christ was equal in divinity to the Father) circa 360, from the region of Antioch; from the so-called *Apostolic*

6. Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate*, vol. 1, *East and West Syria* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992).

7. For some of the relevant texts, see Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*.

8. Fikret Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

Tradition once associated with a Hippolytus; and prayers from a collection by Bishop Serapion of Thmuis and the *Canons of Hippolytus*, both reflecting Egyptian practices.

The picture that develops is of regional variations within an emerging common liturgical framework. In Jerusalem, candidates had to “sign up” before Lent, and they were given instruction during Lent leading up to baptism at Easter, which was becoming the preferred time for baptism. Toward the end of the instruction period, the Creed was “given” to the candidates. They also received exorcisms, since this instruction time may have been regarded as a time when the devil and demons would assault the candidates. On Easter Eve the candidates experienced a ritual in which they renounced the devil, his works, and powers of this world; stripped; were anointed and baptized; and, after the postbaptismal anointing, put on a white garment. Cyril gives the prebaptismal anointing a christological significance, and the postbaptismal anointing he associates with the Holy Spirit. Here we see that the two anointings, which have a parallel in secular bathing, are given theological meanings. In some later rites oil is also poured into the baptismal water, which again has a parallel in secular bathing custom.

The *Apostolic Constitutions* witnesses to a particular community, and its prayers cannot be regarded as applicable to all Christian communities of Antioch and its environs. In book 7, chapters 39–45, there is instruction, ritualized by prayer and the laying on of hands. A full description of the renunciation of Satan is given, and that is followed by the recitation of the Creed. There is a prebaptismal anointing, and then the water is blessed, and the prayer contains the following words: “Look down from heaven, and sanctify the water, [and] give it grace and power, so that he who is to be baptized, according to the commandments of your Christ, may be crucified with him, and be buried with him, and may rise with him, to be adopted in him, that he may die to sin and live to righteousness.”⁹ After the baptism with the triune formula, the candidates were anointed with myron (perfumed oil), followed by the laying on of hands and the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer.

John Chrysostom’s three sets of homilies, given at differing periods in Lent, witness to the exorcisms of candidates, the need for sponsors, the renunciation of Satan, a prebaptismal anointing of the whole body, and a triple immersion for baptism. No mention is made of a postbaptismal anointing, which has led some scholars to suggest that the rite known to him did not contain one.¹⁰ The homilies of Theodore may have been given when he was

9. Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 39.

10. Hugh Riley, *Christian Initiation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1974).

a presbyter with Chrysostom in Antioch, or when he was later bishop of Mopsuestia. In his description of the renunciation of Satan, he likens it to a trial in a law court. He mentions the stripping of clothes for the baptism, the anointing, the baptism, the putting on of a white garment, and a post-baptismal anointing.

The homilies of Zeno of Verona, bishop circa 362–370, have been studied by Gordon Jeanes, who thinks it possible to reconstruct from them the service presupposed by Zeno. Jeanes posits a sequence of anointing, renunciation, entry to the baptistery, stripping, immersion, anointing with sealing, clothing with a white garment, and the paschal Eucharist. He suggests that *Homily 1.37* might allude to renunciations.¹¹ Much more information can be gleaned on the practice in Milan when Ambrose was bishop. Ambrose claimed that the rite of Milan was very much like that of Rome, save for one or two differences. Candidates gathered on Saturday night at Paschal Tide, and the bishop touched their ears and nostrils, ritualizing the miracle in the Gospels when Jesus touched the ears and eyes of the deaf and dumb man. In the baptistery the candidates were anointed as athletes about to wrestle. They renounced the devil and all his works and were baptized, the water having been exorcised and blessed. There was a threefold immersion, which is described in Pauline terms of death, and so is tomblike, and this was followed by chrismation. There was also a footwashing, which differentiated the use of Milan from that of Rome. Ambrose also mentions a sealing, and it is unclear whether this was accompanied by a hand-laying and a further anointing. That is the pattern found in the *Apostolic Tradition*. In the mid-twentieth century, scholars believed this was by Hippolytus, bishop of Rome (ca. 215). More recent scholarship sees it as a composite document dating from the late third or early fourth century and reflecting several traditions. However, its description of the pattern of initiation is one that became peculiar to Rome. After baptism the candidates were anointed by a presbyter and then were taken to the bishop, where they received an episcopal hand-laying and further chrismation. This peculiar Roman episcopal ritual would eventually spin off as a separate service called confirmation.

From Egypt there are prayers for baptism in the *Euchology of Serapion*, who was bishop of Thmuis (339–360). There are no directions for how the service

11. Gordon P. Jeanes, *The Day Has Come: Easter and Baptism in Zeno of Verona* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995). The terms “seal” and “sealing” reflect the Greek word *sphragis*, which has a range of meanings but typically indicates ownership—such as the seal on a document. “Sealing” might mean the sign of the cross made by the celebrant’s thumb or finger with the oil, or the laying of the hand on the head.

was ordered, but there are prayers for catechumens, for baptism, and for oil.¹² Another document is the *Canons of Hippolytus*, a version of the *Apostolic Tradition*. The canons stress that candidates must be rigorously examined, and people with certain professions are excluded. There was a threefold immersion with creedal interrogatories, a postbaptismal anointing, a hand-laying, and a further anointing by the bishop. These two collections suggest that there was more than one use in Egypt.

The cumulative evidence from this period suggests that an interval of instruction preceded baptism and was associated with Lent, though the length differed from place to place. Candidates were separated out as catechumens, and at Easter (as the preferred time) they were baptized and incorporated as members of the church. This basic pattern falls into the “Rites of Passage” categories, made famous by Arnold van Gennep, of Separation (made catechumens), Liminality (as catechumens, no longer non-Christian, but not yet full members), and Integration (baptism). Another development, at least in the West, stemmed from the teaching of St. Augustine of Hippo, who, on the basis of the Latin mistranslation of the Greek in Romans, formulated a doctrine of original sin. This led to the belief that the unbaptized were damned, and it would lead in the medieval West to the requirement for babies to be baptized within a few days, lest they die without the saving effects of baptism.

Another question pertains to the level of undress during baptism. In the Greco-Roman world the custom at public baths differed from place to place, and in some places men and women bathed together naked. In Christian baptism the rite was not public, suggesting that candidates were naked, though in some places there is evidence that a covering was used for modesty. It appears that one of the duties of deaconesses was to anoint women candidates by rubbing oil all over their bodies. Following Greco-Roman local bathing customs, it seems that in some places the candidates were naked at baptism, and at others they were scantily dressed.¹³

Classical Baptismal Rites of East and West

These fourth- and early-fifth-century commentaries give the main ingredients, East and West, of the liturgies that were evolving. The Eastern churches

12. For how the prayers might have been used, see Maxwell Johnson, *The Prayers of Serapion of Thmuis: A Literary, Liturgical and Theological Analysis*, *Orientalia Christiania Analecta* 249 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1995).

13. Bryan D. Spinks, “Much Ado about Nothing (On): Nudity and Baptism in Ravenna Revisited,” *Anaphora* 8 (2014): 13–22.

were divided over the christological disputes of the fifth and sixth centuries, and so the evolving rites also took on a denominational identity. The East Syrian Baptismal Ordo is reputed to have been revised by Catholicos Iso'yabh III (ca. 649–659) and is a rite that assumes that candidates are infants. Although some of the later East Syrian commentators refer to the older “staged rites” performed over a period of time, this ordo assumes initiation in a single ritual. There is a consecration of oil and of water, and these prayers have been conformed to a pattern found in eucharistic prayers, with the inclusion of the sanctus. In this tradition oil from the *qarna* is added to the new oil—the tradition being that the *qarna* derives from a mixture of water from Christ’s baptism and which flowed from his pierced side, mixed with oil by the disciples at Pentecost. It is an interesting material link with Christ’s baptism.

The image of baptism as womb is quite strong in this tradition. This is even more so in the Maronite Rite, named after Jacob of Serug, which has links both with the older Syriac tradition and with the Syrian Orthodox tradition. The Maronite Rite emphasizes the image of the candidate being marked as a sheep and reborn from the womb of the font. The Syrian Orthodox tradition knew two rites, one named after a Timothy, which is no longer used, and one named after Severus of Antioch, which is the one now in use. This latter rite has two sections, which is a telescoping of the once staged rites. Tomb and resurrection are the dominant theme. The Byzantine (Eastern Orthodox) Rite has a prayer over the water that seems to have undergone only minimal development compared to other Eastern traditions. The oldest text is found in the *Barberini 336 Euchologion*, and this includes some prayers for catechumens that indicate a rite phased over time. The developed rite has a prebaptismal anointing and then, after baptism, the candidate is anointed on the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, and ears with the words “the seal of the gift of the Spirit.” The Armenian Rite has its own identity but has been influenced by both the Byzantine and the Latin rites. The Coptic Rite has close affinities with the earlier Egyptian *Canons of Hippolytus*, and the Ethiopic Rite follows the Coptic, with one or two variations.¹⁴

In the West, we have already noted that the rite of Milan was not identical to that of Rome—there were geographical differences. In addition to the use of Rome, there was a Gallican Rite, used in the Frankish lands, and also a Spanish or Visigothic Rite. One of the main differences between these and the use in Rome was that, in the former, initiation was completed by the

14. For the texts of these, see Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, esp. chaps. 3–8.

presbyter, whereas in Rome the presbyter's anointing was supplemented by an episcopal hand-laying and anointing. Over time, it was the Roman use that came to be adopted throughout the West, though it was never a "pure" Roman use, since it absorbed some things from the other Western rites. Our earliest full liturgy for this hybrid Roman Rite is found in Codex Vaticanus Reginensis Latinus 316, dating from around 750 from a nunnery in Chelles, near Paris, but seems to reflect an earlier time, circa 628–715. Although the structure of the rite assumes a series of stages throughout Lent culminating in Easter baptism, and so is for adults, the focus of the rite is on *infantes*—young children and infants.

Like the Eastern rites, this witnesses to the fact that in "Christendom" the only nonbaptized were newborn children from Christian families. In later Western baptismal rites, although there were certainly diocesan and local variations, a standard set of prayers and rituals was used, and telescoped into a single service and used for infants. The child and parents met at the church door for the first part of the service—the old catechumenate. There was an exorcism, marking the candidate with the sign of the cross, and inquiry of the name of the candidate. There were further prayers of exorcism with anointings, a reading of the gospel, the laying on of hands, and "delivery" of (now just the priest reciting) the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. On entry into the church the Litany of the Saints was recited, and the blessing of the font took place. This blessing has been formed by amalgamation of elements from Gallican and Roman usages. The Creed was recited by the candidate, followed by a threefold immersion/pouring with the Matthean formula. There was anointing and the putting on of a white cap as well as the christening garment, the chrisom. A lighted candle was also sometimes given. Ideally the episcopal rite followed. This became separated by days, then weeks, then months and years, and developed as a separate rite called confirmation and was regarded as a separate sacrament. This would cause the Reformation to reimagine confirmation (as a rite of maturity after catechesis), and it has caused considerable discussion and argument in twentieth-century liturgical reforms.

The Reforms of the Magisterial Reformers

The Eastern rites as they had developed mainly stayed intact with little textual change. The West, however, faced divisions and splits at the Reformation. Although all the reformers regarded the inherited Roman Rite as superstitious and in need of reform, they disagreed among themselves over the theology of baptism and of how to reform the liturgical rite. Martin Luther taught

that the central themes of baptism were death/resurrection and justification by faith through grace. He defended infant baptism on the grounds of *fides aliena*, the faith of others. He also believed that baptism removes original sin, and exorcisms witness to the reality of Satan.

Luther authored two baptismal liturgies. The first, in 1523, removed some of the elements that he believed obscured a clearer meaning in the old rite. He removed the exorcism of salt, though still used salt, and removed the blessing of the water. In his own prayer associated with the water (known as his “flood prayer”), he articulated the belief that by his baptism in the Jordan, Christ had sanctified all water. Luther retained exorcisms, the anointings, and the giving of the white robe and the lighted candle. In the second liturgy in his 1526 rite, most of the exorcisms, the anointings, and the lighted candle were abolished. Lutheran cities followed either one or the other of these rites, though with freedom to retain or add other things, and so there is considerable variation among the Lutheran baptismal rites, and this is particularly apparent in the forms used in the Church of Sweden.¹⁵ Luther worked with an understanding of *adiaphora*—if something wasn’t specifically prohibited in Scripture, it was optional and permissible.

Huldrych Zwingli, the reformer of Zurich, worked with a different hermeneutic. Unless Scripture mandated something, it should not be used. The first rite in Zurich was that of Leo Jud, which was based on Luther’s 1526 rite. Zwingli believed that sacraments were badges of Christian profession—our testimony to belief—and not something in which God gives grace. At one point he seems to have sided with the growing Anabaptist movement, which held that only believers’ baptism was valid, and repudiated infant baptism. Zwingli then changed his mind and defended infant baptism, using the concept of covenant, on analogy with male circumcision in the Old Testament. Infants are baptized into the covenant because of the faith and commitment of their parents. His baptismal rite of 1525, following Jud’s earlier order, was brief. The minister asked the godparents if they wished for the child to be baptized. There followed a version of Luther’s prayer for the water, a reading from Mark, and baptism into the triune name. The practice of dressing the initiate in a white garment was retained. The rite ended with a dismissal in peace.

The other famous member of the Reformation trilogy was John Calvin. He drew up a rite in 1540 when minister to the French congregation in Strasbourg.

15. Kent Burrison, “The Saving Flood: The Medieval Origins, Historical Development, and Theological Import of the Sixteenth Century Lutheran Baptismal Rites” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2002).

Whereas for his Communion service he used Martin Bucer's Strasbourg Rite as his own basis, for his baptism rite he used a previous liturgy of William Farel for Neuchâtel of 1533. Calvin altered some of Farel's explications. There was a request for the child's name, explication, a prayer and the Lord's Prayer, a second request for baptism, an admonition (which included a paraphrase of the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and a call to live a gospel life), a reading from Matthew 19, and baptism with the Matthean formula. Then came the dismissal.

Calvin made some slight changes in his 1542 rite for Geneva. Important for Calvin was the concept of covenant, and here he followed Zwingli. However, Calvin was also influenced by Luther and regarded sacraments as rites where God's grace may be given. Of the Reformation rites, one of the most conservative was that for the Church of England, made by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. He shared Luther's idea of original sin, and he defended infant baptism—not on the grounds of covenant but on the basis of Jesus's receiving the little children. In the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549, he retained many things from the medieval rite, and the first part of the rite was at the church door. He seemed in fact to give ritual expression to Mark 10 and the receiving of the children. He used Luther's flood prayer. The second part of the rite was conducted at the font. He retained the giving of the white robe and anointings. A major theme was incorporation into the ark of the church. A separate blessing of water was also provided.

A more Protestant book appeared in 1552, and here the rite of 1549 is simplified. It all takes place at the font; anointings were removed, as was the white robe. The blessing of the font was modified and incorporated into the service, but the priest no longer blessed the water. A petition to bless water had to wait until the prayer book was revised in 1662. Thomas Cranmer retained a service of confirmation, reserved for the bishop and necessary for admission to Communion. He used much of the medieval rite, though without the anointing and without explicit conferral of the Holy Spirit. Other Reformation churches modified confirmation to make it a rite of maturity in the faith, after a period of instruction. This was regarded as a "topping up" or supplying the explicit faith of the candidate missing in infant baptism. That was one answer to the problem of explicit profession of faith.

The other was that developed by the Anabaptists, and then later by the English Baptists, which regarded infant baptism as no baptism and insisted on believer's baptism—at a time of maturity with a personal confession of faith. In sixteenth-century Anabaptism and seventeenth-century English Baptist churches, the mode of baptism had varied, but as the English Baptist tradition developed, the mode of baptism became submersion, or "total immersion."

The Roman Rite was standardized at the Council of Trent, and Reformation rites underwent little change, though in the eighteenth-century “age of reason” some were modified to express the rationalism of the age, particularly by downplaying sin and the power of evil.

Some Trends in the Modern and Postmodern Era

In the modern period many Western churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, have revised their liturgies in the wake of the liturgical and ecumenical movements, and there are far too many to discuss in detail. These liturgical revisions often draw on studies of the ancient classical texts while adapting the liturgy to current pastoral and missional needs. The Roman Catholic Church produced a rite for infants and a staged series of rites for adults—*Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)*. Confirmation can be delegated to the priest. *RCIA* took seriously the need for instruction over a period of time, and other churches have made attempts to provide similar new liturgies. In Anglicanism there was a concern to rejoin confirmation to baptism, but this remains problematic when confirmation is still reserved as an episcopal rite. There has been a new emphasis on public baptism in the presence of a congregation; this was urged by all Protestant reformers, but since the Reformation many churches resorted to private family baptisms. Some churches use seasonal material, acknowledging that not everything can be said about baptism in a liturgy, and at different liturgical seasons certain themes can be more prominent, such as new birth at Epiphany and death/resurrection at Easter.

The World Council of Churches’ report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982) outlined commonly accepted theological themes of baptism. It urged pedobaptist churches to think carefully about how they nurtured infants after baptism, and it urged those who practice only believers’ baptism to reflect on the place of infants in the church communities. It also urged churches to consider using generous amounts of water in the ritual rather than a token sprinkling; and so that all churches could accept the validity of one another’s baptisms, it recommended the use of the threefold Matthean formula. This was because some smaller groups insisted on baptism into the name of Jesus only, and others, because of the concern for inclusive language, were altering the Matthean formula to Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.¹⁶ Some more

16. This formula in English avoids masculine language, but at the expense of an orthodox trinitarian doctrine—all three persons of the Trinity are involved in creation, redemption, and sustaining the church and world.

recent studies have urged the need to engage with parents seeking baptism for their infants, using it as a mission opportunity, and also to push back against the idea that the rites should minimize or omit references to evil and the devil.¹⁷

Practical Implications for Worship

What are some lessons for the postmodern, missional church? The New Testament is the source for doctrine, not liturgy. Baptismal rites of the past provide sources for inspiration, but there is no golden age that can be revived for the present. Churches need to consider what is helpful for reuse and reimaging for today's challenges. Sweet-smelling oil, a lighted candle, a white garment, and a generous use of water can all be useful symbols.¹⁸ Baptisteries need to visually proclaim the meaning of baptism; "bird baths" and plain, small swimming pools convey nothing much; new birth in church should have the same welcoming as a new member of a family usually has. Not everything about baptism and the Christian life can be crammed into a single liturgy; careful teaching after baptism is as important as prebaptismal preparation.

For Further Reading

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17. Sandra Millar, *Life Events: Mission and Ministry at Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals* (London: Church House, 2018); Sarah Lawrence, *A Rite on the Edge: The Language of Baptism and Christening in the Church of England* (London: SCM, 2019); Tom Clammer, *Fight Valiantly: Evil and the Devil in Liturgy* (London: SCM, 2019).

18. New symbols should be used with caution. One church I served gave a "baptismal teddy bear," which was placed in the font, and the baptism itself was administered from a bowl. The bear was a nice gesture (for infants!) but had replaced serious use of water. What did it in fact symbolize?

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