

**BAPTISM IN SOME CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE EFFECT OF THE  
SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM ON CHRISTIAN  
COMMITMENT**

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## ABSTRACT

The significance of baptism in relation to its effect on Christian commitment can be simply described as an experience, which depends on the state of the human heart. The objective of this work is most importantly to stimulate believers to a life of total commitment to Jesus Christ as it examines the various historical accounts of baptism in the Old Testament and Jewish, New Testament, Pre-Reformation, Reformation, Radical Reformation and Modern Era. This work has given attention to an analytical evaluation of the baptismal act in five denominations (Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), and Deeper Life) to determine the effect of the significance of the baptismal act on candidates.

The psychological, religious, personal, theological, ethical and sociological implications of the various baptismal acts on candidates were also considered to ascertain the extent to which the spiritual significance of baptism is achieved in <sup>the</sup> life of the recipients. The work further investigates how the ethno-linguistic, cultural and religious background of an individual helps to deepen the understanding of the importance of baptism in the candidate.

Based on the field results, the research also suggests a baptismal preparation programme and liturgy for the contemporary church to make more explicit the meaning and significance of baptism in relation to Christian discipleship.

CHAPTER 2

Old Testament

New Testament

Pre-Reformation (Catholic, Orthodox)

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## *Conclusion*

Today in Christendom a lot of people view their baptism as “just an outward symbol”. The following are some of the reasons we can adduce from this survey. Baptism is seen as what gives eligibility for full membership of a local church, what gives eligibility to speak at business meeting, what gives eligibility to vote for decisions, what gives eligibility to serve in the church, and what gives eligibility to participate in the Lord’s Supper.

We must realize that whatever God institutes and commands cannot be underestimated. Symbols are very powerful and baptism as a symbol has great significance and benefit. In the act of baptism we declare before the world that we believe that Jesus Christ died, was buried and rose again. We ourselves once dead in sins have been raised up in Christ Jesus. We part with our old life and enter into a new life to the glory of God. We believe in the future resurrection of the dead. And we declare our allegiance to Jesus Christ by following his example and obeying his command in this way He has appointed.<sup>1</sup> Baptism helps the believer to make a determination to always do the will of God, which is the hallmark of true discipleship. Pastors have a responsibility by the thrust of their preaching, teaching and counseling to create baptismal consciousness in the hearts of members of their congregation. They need to help them understand that baptism in itself has no effect on the believer. It is a relationship to Christ and his work of salvation. So the fear being expressed by

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Frost, The Moral Dignity of Baptism (Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1939), p. 76.

candidates in this study because their baptism was deferred is totally unfounded, if they are genuinely converted. We also need to know that the baptismal water does not possess any magical properties, which imparts Christian commitment. Nevertheless, the moral response, which calls for a conscious determination to do right, is very important. The feet would no longer be engaged on errands of hurt or mischief to fellow human beings; the sexual organs would no longer be devoted to lustful and harmful purposes; the hands would no longer minister hurt to other; the mouth would no longer lend itself to unguided speech; the eyes would no longer look upon evil with pleasure; the ears would no longer listen to slander and false evidence and take delight in it; and the brain would no longer devise schemes of deception and terror. It is a total surrender to the will of God and the way of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The element of baptism (water) also has several other important uses in life. For drinking, cooking, washing, bathing, etc. But as we daily interact with water in one way or another, it should also remind us of our baptism. Baptism does not immunize the believer against sin. However, it symbolizes a change of life, orientation and commitment. It is a mark of identification and initiation. According to Davidson, Christian commitment is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Because of the sinfulness of humanity and the deceitfulness of the heart, a consistent life of Christian commitment appears to be elusive. Calvin Johansson says discipline is the pathway which God has designed to bring believers into the maturity that He envisions. And the price we must pay is discipleship.<sup>3</sup> We need to view baptism as the public declaration of the new citizenship God offers freely to us as believers, with a

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen J. England, *The One Baptism* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1960), p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin M. Johansson, *Disciplining Music Ministry* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), p.

responsibility to stay committed to the way of life of the new community, which is based on faith, obedience and hope. The significance of our baptism must be reflected in our daily lives, as a testimony of who we are and whose we are – DISCIPLES OF CHRIST. We must always remember that the life of a disciple is a life characterized by a “baptismal shape.” Dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

### **Recommendation**

Baptism faces the possibility of becoming a mere spiritual drama, if the baptismal act does not aid the candidates and the observers to hold the experience in joyous memory.<sup>4</sup> In chapter three we considered how the five denominations in this survey express their baptismal act in ways to ensure an inspiring fulfillment of this divine command (see Appendix IV) for the baptismal act of the Methodist, Lutheran and Presbyterian denominations). Based on the findings in this survey, the following is a proposal of a baptismal preparation programme and liturgy for the contemporary church.

#### Baptismal Preparation Programme

A week long programme of teaching and retreat have been proposed for the preparation of baptismal candidates after their conversion as follows:

<b>DAY</b>	<b>ACTIVITY/TOPIC</b>
	(TEACHING)
Day 1 (Monday)	The Necessity for Spiritual Rebirth <sup>5</sup> (John 3: 1 - 17).
Day 2 (Tuesday)	Abiding in Christ <sup>6</sup> (Romans 6: 1 – 14).
Day 3 (Wednesday)	Following the Footsteps of Christ <sup>7</sup> (Colossians 2: 6 – 23).
Day 4 (Thursday)	The Responsibilities of Baptized Believers <sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth I. Brown, “..... and Be Baptized”: A Minister’s Handbook on Baptism (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1962), pp. 21-27.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen F. Winward, The New Testament Teaching on Baptism (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press Ltd., 1963), pp. 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> Winward, pp. 46-47.

<sup>7</sup> Winward, pp. 50-51.

<sup>8</sup> Winward, pp. 56-58.

