BAPTISM, SCRIPTURES ON

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Additional to all the other preconference materials available toward Craigville Theological Colloquy V ("Baptism in the United Church of Christ"), this Thinksheet is to provide the major biblical materials for the 14Aug88 9.30pm Group Leaders' Orientation....Pertinent also are #1864 on baptism vis-a-vis ecumenism & #2232 on baptism vis-a-vis feminism.

While I'm eager to provide the listing that follows, I must mention two hesitances: [1] Of the voluminous literature on baptism, nothing is as easy to put your hands on as articles in biblical dictionaries, encyclopedias, and word-study sets (eg, Kittel's TDNT, now published in simpler form). Why should I bother to list the baptism scriptures? Handy reference at the Colloquy, that's the only reason. [2] How sort the baptism scriptures for presentation? Having struggled with eight categorizations (and being sorely tempted by the metaphorical--eg, "Baptism is the door," a positional, spacial metaphor), I've settled for the **historical**, which roughly correlates with the canonical.

1. **OLD TESTAMENT.** Two realities here: (1) As a from-and-to separation rite, Christian baptism is double: from the pagan world, corresponding to circumcision and proselyte baptism, both Jewish practices; and, as "in Jesus' name" and then with the trinitarian formula, from the non-Jesus-following Jewish world. (2) Christianity developed its own form of the Jewish rabbinical throw-forward exegesis, the holy books used as mines for digging out precursors, "types," using a fourfold exegesis closely paralleling the Jewish. Here, then, are what the earliest Christians saw as harbingers of Christian baptism. Their serious but free use of the Septuagint, which was at first all they had of written scripture, reminds me of Robert Paul's "biblically based but not biblically bound," and of my "free in, through, with, and from the Bible." ....**Jn. Baptist** is, textually, the magnet drawing together the OT materials the early Christians used as catenae, literally "chains" of references in "testimony books" for preaching, teaching, prayer-study-meditation, apologetic, and polemic. Jn.'s story appears immediately after the first vs. of what most scholars think is the earliest gospel: M.1^{2-8}. THEMES: complex water-symbolism (chaos, disorder, destruction, death; life and fertility; cleansing, purity; the spirit), covenant renewal, the arrival of the Kingdom (the note, also in Jesus, of prophetic-eschatological urgency). Red Sea: Ex.15^{8} Is.51^{9f}. A bath and fresh garments as preparation for covenant-renewal: Ex.$19^{10,14}$ Josh.$24^{14,23}$ Gn. 35^{1-4}. Life-renewal and water-sprinkling: Ezek.36^{25-27}. Finally, the water/spirit connection, so important in the NT, is OT: Ezek.36^{25-27} Ps.33^{6f} Gn.1^{2}.

2. **JESUS' BAPTISM** in submission to Jn. Baptist is pregnant with anaphors (resonances from the Jewish past and present) and cataphors (anticipations of, and mirror reflections from, early Christian baptism). The event itself contains in nuce the mystery of the Jewish/Christian relationship till Kingdom come. One way to put it: was Jesus' baptism Jewish or Christian? The overlap reminds me of the catch question about 1 BC/BCE and AD/CE 1: neither exists, there's only the year 1, which can be viewed as both or as *a se*, *an sich*, a third reality, parallel with the early Christians' self-description as "the third people." Jesus let himself come under Jn.'s deed but also his word, his messianic preaching that his baptism was anticipatory, **provisional**, in preparation of a people to receive Messiah, who is (Mt.3^{2}) "at hand"--(L.1^{17}) "a people prepared." In anticipating the Parousia, Christian baptism is like John's; but as constituting a new people, it is **proleptic**, "seizing the future ahead of time" (*pro-lepsis*)--a people constituted, pledged, engaged (*arrabon*, first instalment, part payment in advance for security, and [modern Greek] engagement ring: 2 Cor.$1^{22}$$5^{5}$ Eph.1^{14}). Jn. differentiated his baptism, as in **water**, from Messiah's, whose baptism would be in **the Holy Spirit** (Mt.3^{11f} $M1^{7f}$ L.3^{15-18}; "dove," with various prepositions, + the Bath Qol, God's voice from heaven, in all accounts of Jesus' baptism: Mt.3^{13-17} M.1^{9-11} L.3^{21f})....As Jn.'s baptism was of repentance for remission of sins (M.1^{4}), Jn. thought it inappropriate for Jesus, who "pleased" the Father (as the heaven-Voice announced) in acting as Servant (Is.42^{1}, beginning of the Servant Songs, reflected in the Voice), in solidarity with sinners bearing their sins (Is.53^{11f} 55) and thus opening redemption to them....Characteristically, the Fourth Gospel sees revelation as the point of Jn.'s baptism (Jn.$1^{26f,31}$)....The Spirit at our Lord's baptism was present for him, proleptic for his followers (Jn.7^{39} Ac.19^{2f}), as was promised for the messianic time (Is.11^{2} Joel 2^{28} Ac.2^{17}).

3. **THE GOSPELS** make further use of baptism, which incipiently and inherently is

a death-to-life passage, for Jesus' passage from crucifixion to resurrection (M.10^{38} L.12^{50}, the baptism task he says [Jn.19^{30}] is "accomplished")--The Servant's suffering to be followed by exaltation (Is.52^{13}ff Phil.2$^{7-11}$). Messiah-Servant was a ransom (Mt.20^{28} Is.53^{12}) for those who witness his baptism for them (and see 1P.2^{24} 2Cor.5^{21})....Our baptism is "evangelical," ie, participant in the Servant's commission, suffering, death, and (proleptically) glorification. It is both an announcement of all this and a pledge so to walk and talk that the world will be aware in whose name we have been baptized and whose baptism continues in our baptizing--thus the Gospels' locus classicus, "Go...baptize" (Mt.28^{19}f, which includes the living and teaching of Christian obedience, the Lord continuing with us in the Spirit "to the end of the age"; here note also the Trinity: in the Spirit we are to obey the Father's teaching in and through the Son and to teach that obedience --Christian faith and order, life and work, worship and ethics, community and service should be viewed--surely it's the First Gospel's intention--as exfoliations of the Great Commission)....As the Fourth Gospel transposes the Supper of the Lord (Jn.6), so baptism, which becomes new birth (3^{5}, Kingdom entry by being "born of water and the Spirit"--debate over "baptismal re-generation"!).

4. **ACTS** is split-stage, the upper drama being what the Spirit's doing and the lower, what the apostles are doing. The Gospels show the Spirit primarily on and in Jesus: Acts, the Spirit **coming on** Christ's body the Church (chap.2, Pentecost, including preaching and baptizing) and **directing** (primarily) the apostles in their missionary activities, again including baptism. Converted Paul is baptized (9^{18}; "sins washed away" 22^{16}), as regularly are the converts in Acts (eg, the jailer's whole family: 16^{33}, the locus classicus, by implication, of "infant," nonconfessor's baptism). The dialog in 19$^{1-7}$ converges Jn.'s baptism and Christian re-baptism (anabaptism, including the Spirit "coming upon" them, glossolia "and also" preaching by the re-baptized)...God's electing grace (13^{48} [Jn.10^{26}ff]), prevenient or participant, pervades baptism in Acts and everywhere in NT: "'Twas grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home" (my diary's only comment, today 48 years ago, on getting my BD that day).

5. And grace is the central word for **PAUL**, our major ancient Christian model for merging the sense it (baptism) makes and the sense we additionally make (of it). But (in contrast to the end of Mt.) "Christ did not send me to baptize" (in context of divisiveness: 1Cor.1$^{10-17}$): baptism has only a derivative significance and efficacy, as a Spirit-directed mimesis of Jesus' death/burial/resurrection (immersion: Ro.6^{3}f, into "union with Christ"; lived out as risen--for his sake: 2Cor. 5^{15}; cf. Phil.2$^{1-18}$ Col.2$^{12-15,20-3}$1). Water (of baptism) is thicker than blood, prior religion, social status, sex: Gal.3$^{23-29}$....He doesn't develop the idea of vicarious baptism for the unbaptized dead, a common gnostic practice taken up by Mormonism: 1Cor.15^{29} ....He's not above spiritualizing, vis-a-vis baptism and the Supper, historical and even legendary material: 1Cor.10$^{1-4}$, though his mind is antimaterialist and antimagical....While faith usually led to baptism in early Christianity, Paul can mention the former without the latter: Ro.10^{9}f (confession of Jesus' lordship is salvific). But we Christians (1Cor.12^{13}) have all been "baptized into the one body by the same Spirit." But (Gal.3^{2}) God's Spirit is "received" not in baptism (or is this arguing from silence?) but "by hearing the gospel and believing it" (cf.vs.14: the Spirit is "received" "through faith")....Paul's note of baptismal unity as inherent in union with Christ reminds us of the Fourth Gospel's insistence on Christian unity (17^{23}) "that the world may know," an accent also in the later OT prophets.

6. **OTHER** NT materials: Ephesians 2$^{5-10}$; 4^{5} "one baptism"; 5^{14}....Hebrews 10^{22} "hearts purified, bodies washed clean with water"....1P.3$^{18-22}$: baptism "saves."... ..Titus 3^{5}: "new birth and new life by washing us."

-------Pp.2-7, the § on baptism in BAPTISM, EUCHARIST, MINISTRY (World Council of Churches, 1982), note the ten NT meaning-images, some with OT base. ....This Thinksheet touches all types of baptism reference, including all of these meaning-images (but not as a listing).