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# Review Article: Ablution, Initiation and Baptism in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism and Early Christianity

*Christoph Stenschke*

David Hellholm, Tor Vegge, Oyvind Norderval, Christer Hellholm (eds.), *Ablution, Initiation and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (BZNW 176.1–3; Berlin, Boston: W. de Gruyter, 2011); three volumes, hb., xlvii + 763, xxviii + 767-1782, xiv + 1786-2024; €279; ISBN 978-3-11-024751-0

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage de 1800 pages rassemble des contributions traitant des ablutions, des rites d'initiation et du baptême, ainsi que des liens étroits entre ces pratiques, dans le monde ancien. À partir d'un projet de recherche scandinave, ces études rédigées en allemand et en anglais abordent des questions méthodologiques et traitent des sujets ci-dessus en considérant les religions de la fin de l'antiquité autres que le judaïsme et le christianisme, puis le judaïsme ancien, le christianisme primitif et la période patristique. L'ensemble s'achève avec cinq études thé-

matiques et des contributions sur l'archéologie et l'histoire de l'art. Cette combinaison d'approches diverses, ainsi que de contributions à partir de différentes disciplines, fait ressortir la diversité des conceptions qui prévalait dans le monde ancien. Cette diversité n'a pas été pleinement explorée par la théologie systématique, ni prise en compte dans la liturgie et la pratique ecclésiales. L'approche générale de l'ouvrage est descriptive : on n'y trouve pas d'essai d'analyse, ni d'indication concernant des lignes directrices ou des thèmes communs aux différentes parties.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese umfangreiche Sammlung von Aufsätzen über nahezu 1800 Seiten ist folgenden Themen gewidmet: rituelle Waschung, Initiation und Taufe in der Welt der Antike und ihre komplexen Zusammenhänge. Auf der Grundlage eines skandinavischen Forschungsprojekts befassen sich die Aufsätze in deutscher und englischer Sprache mit methodologischen Betrachtungen, ritueller Waschung, Einführungsriten und Taufe in den Religionen der Spätantike außerhalb von Judentum und Christentum so wie im Frühjudentum, in der Urchristenheit und in

der patristischen bzw. spätantiken Epoche. Der Band schließt mit fünf thematischen Aufsätzen und weiteren Aufsätzen, die der Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte gewidmet sind. Diese Verknüpfung von verschiedenen neuen Aspekten und Disziplinen zeigt die Vielfalt von Konzepten, die in der Welt der Antike vorherrschten. Diese Vielfalt wurde noch nicht voll erforscht durch die systematische Theologie und auch noch nicht voll ausgeschöpft durch Liturgie oder Gemeindepraxis. Der Ansatz ist im Großen und Ganzen beschreibend; es lässt sich kein Versuch erkennen, das Material zu analysieren und Hauptgedanken oder allgemeine Themen aufzuzeigen.

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## SUMMARY

This substantial collection of essays of almost 1800 pages is devoted to ablution, initiation and baptism in the ancient world and their intricate interrelationship. Based on a Scandinavian research project, the essays in

German and English address the methodological considerations, ablution, initiation and baptism in the religions of late antiquity outside of Judaism and Christianity as well as in early Judaism, in earliest Christianity and in the patristic/late ancient period. The volumes close with five thematic essays and essays devoted to archaeology and

art history. This combination of different, fresh perspectives and disciplines indicates the variety of concepts that were prevalent in the ancient world. This variety has not yet been fully explored by systematic theology or in the

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The present set of three volumes contains the results of a major research project entitled *Ablution, Initiation and Baptism in Antiquity*, organised by Scandinavian scholars. The participants in the project met in 2008 and 2009; the papers read and discussed on those occasions were later supplemented by other papers. The project involved 58 scholars; it was international,

interdisciplinary, with Historians of Religion, Classicists, Egyptologists, Biblical and Patristic scholars as well as Art Historians and Archaeologists; it should further be interdenominational with among others, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant scholars (from the preface in vol. 1, xlv–xlvi).

The essays are written in English and German. All essays, in particular the German ones, would have benefited from English abstracts.

*Volume 1* opens with an introductory essay by the patristic scholar C. Markschie who aptly summarises the contribution that the essays of both volumes make towards understanding the history of Christian baptism, its pre-history and its immediate reception history. He also lists the questions and issues that are still open for further discussion despite this major research project, and sketches areas which need attention in future research. Markschie suggests that further inquiries into the subject should use the methodology of ‘dense description’, which means in this case

paying attention to the more quiet signals in the texts, for example, the secondary ending of Mark’s Gospel and the question whether such texts, which are often neglected in this context, contain important information regarding the role of baptism in early Christian mission and propaganda. (lx)

He further argues that further research needs to be done

in the field of ecclesial law and the history of liturgy which were often neglected, in particular in Protestant research of ancient Christianity. The important issues of ecclesial law have not been discussed sufficiently and studied particularly for the later era of the ancient church, for exam-

plurgy and practice of the Church. The overall approach is descriptive; no attempt is made to analyse the material and to indicate major trajectories or common themes.

ple the notorious question of the recognition of baptism conducted by heretics or schismatics in the Western and Eastern churches which has not been addressed sufficiently for the third and fourth centuries. (ix)

Markschie also notes the large variations in liturgical practices and the extent to which the norms (in church orders and liturgical books) and the actual practice of the rite differed in individual churches and congregations. In addition, the contributions to the project indicated

that the application of ritual theory and other quests from the various cultural sciences by scholars of liturgy to the procedure of baptismal preparation, the actual act of baptism and post-baptismal rites as it can be reconstructed from the pertinent sources is still in its beginnings, but promises rich rewards. (lxi)

Furthermore, scholars have hardly addressed the nature of the relationship between baptism and church membership on the way to the Constantinian or Theodosian Church of the empire and its further developments after the fourth century. Markschie also suggests that there is a need to examine the late ancient era in its entirety up to the eighth century (e.g. John of Damascus) based on the present essays and the methodology developed here.

### Antiquity

In *Part one*, ‘Methodological Considerations’, A. Klostergaard Petersen offers a survey of ‘Rituals of Purification, Rituals of Initiation: Phenomenological, Taxonomical and Culturally Evolutionary Reflections’. His discussion includes the intricate relationship between rituals of purification and initiation and the prevalence of water as a ritual means in the ancient Mediterranean world. The essay also addresses terminology, rites of passage, individual phases of the ritual, rituals of initiation and other rituals, rituals of purification and different types of ritual in the ancient world. The author argues that while rituals of purification and initiation are found across many cultures, the ritual

of baptism is closely related to the emergence of the utopian type of religion (one that has experienced the transition from a locative form of religion, so in the categories of Jonathan Z. Smith).

*Part two* surveys ablution, initiation and baptism in religions of Late Antiquity outside Judaism and Christianity. J. Assmann and A. Kucharek discuss water in the cultural perspective of ancient Egypt, the Egyptian theory of the flooding of the Nile, water and purification in the cult of the dead and of Osiris, the Theban festival of the decades and the cult of the dead in late-Egypt and the notion of the ‘baptism’ of Pharaoh. A. Hultgard writes on ‘The Mandaean Water Ritual in Late Antiquity’ (the *masbuta* as a late Antiquity ritual, its Iranian elements and its significance in understanding Mandaean origins). In ‘Baptism and Greco-Roman Mystery Cults’, F. Graf analyses Justin Martyr’s references to pagan baptismal rituals, Tertullian’s testimonies and the relationship between baptismal cleansing and various pagan purification rituals. B.A. Pearson addresses baptism in Sethian Gnostic texts, offering a definition and describing essential features of Sethian Gnosticism. He further examines references to baptism in various Gnostic writings, including the Gospel of Judas. G. Wurst covers Mani’s rejection of baptism in the controversy with the Elchesaites, the rejection and spiritualisation of baptism in various (anti)Manichaean sources and rites of initiation in Manichaeism. The essays indicate that various forms of ablution, initiation and baptism were common in the religions of late antiquity. Occurrences in early Judaism and Christianity need to be seen against this background; in this context they made sense and had to make sense in continuity and in contrast.

### Judaism

Four essays in *Part three* are devoted to ablution, initiation and baptism in early Judaism. A. Labahn surveys ablution and ritual purification in early Judaism: the occurrences in the *Testamentum Levi*, in *Jubilees*, in the *Letter of Aristeas* and the various Dead Sea Scroll references. In this context, ablution is understood as the restoration of quality of life. S. Freyne compares Jewish immersion and Christian baptism; he describes the theory and practice of Jewish ritual washing, the literary evidence and the many Jewish *miqva’ot*, the ‘borderline’ existence of Jewish-Christian baptism and the origin and function of immersion in relation to the two developing orthodoxies of Rabbinic Judaism

and Catholic Christianity. C.K. Rothschild writes on the uncertain authenticity of Josephus’ witness to John the Baptist; she offers a detailed analysis of the text and context of *AntJud* 18.116–119 and of its reception history in the manuscript evidence, in Origen and in Eusebius, who can be understood as witnesses to Josephus.

In “‘Ist er heraufgestiegen, gilt er in jeder Hinsicht als ein Israelit“ (bYev 47b): Das Proselytentauchbad im frühen Judentum’, D. Sänger first examines the nature of early Judaism and its relationship to the wider Graeco-Roman world. He sketches the far-reaching consequences which conversion to Judaism had for gentiles. Against this background it would be plausible to assume that from the middle of the first century BC onwards gentiles willing to convert, in particular women who would not be circumcised, had to undergo some kind of ablution for cultic cleansing and in order to establish them as members of the Jewish community (294). Sänger then surveys the current state of research regarding the baptism of proselytes to Judaism (294–298), covering its origin, age, nature, function and significance, all of which are disputed. He next re-examines the most important texts regarding their age and the function ascribed to the rite, in order to find out whether the baptism of John the Baptist and Christian baptism have their roots in Jewish proselyte baptism, as is usually assumed. He further examines the terminology employed for the *baptism* of proselytes and notes that the designation in itself is not helpful as it is a case of *interpretatio Christiana*. He then discusses the relationship between the immersion/baptism of proselytes, the baptism of John and Christian baptism in the available sources (TestLev 14:6; Sib 4:162–169; Epictetus, *Diss* II.9:19–21 and several rabbinic sources). In these sources, proselyte baptism can be understood as a ritual act of initiation into Israel (324). Like others before him, Sänger argues that proselyte baptism was *not* the model for John’s baptism (325; see e.g. D.S. Dockery, ‘Baptism’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 55–58). In fact he suggests that the Christian baptismal practice may have influenced developments in late Second Temple Judaism and early Rabbinic Judaism rather than vice versa, as is commonly assumed. Sänger inquires ‘... to what extent the Christian practice of baptism impacted on the formation of proselyte baptism and promoted its dissemination and eventual acceptance’ (326) and concludes:

In view of the fact that there is no dependable evidence for an early dating of the immersion of proselytes and that there are no literary references to instruction / catechesis in combination with these immersions before the middle of the second century, this alternative consideration of influence becomes rather plausible (327; detailed bibliography on 327-334).

If correct, this reconstruction of the direction of influence throws an interesting light on the early interaction between Jews and Christians and indicates that the 'parting of the ways' may have been less radical and later than has often been assumed. In that case early Rabbinic Judaism was inspired by the way in which Jewish Christianity included gentile converts in its ranks.

### New Testament and Early Church

*Part four* includes studies on ablution, initiation and baptism in earliest Christianity and the New Testament. It opens with an essay by M. Labahn on the origin of Christian baptism according to early Christian sources, which surveys the baptism of Jesus, baptism in the early Jerusalem community, Jesus as baptiser and John the Baptist as points of departure. According to Labahn, baptism appears as a post-Easter creation and as an initiation ritual into the new community in continuity with the baptism of John. H.D. Betz writes on Jesus' baptism and the origins of the Christian ritual of baptism, addressing issues of historiography and of comparative religion. He sees Mark 1:9-11 as the earliest baptismal account and studies its interpretation in the other Gospels. According to Mark, 'the scandal of the cross unfolded in Jesus' life on earth, beginning with his baptism by John the Baptist' (393). L. Hartman, author of the entry on 'Baptism' in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, offers notes on the baptismal formulas. He surveys the different formulas 'into the name of the Lord Jesus', 'in the name of Jesus Christ', 'because of the name of Jesus Christ', 'into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' and their occurrence in different communication situations from the 'enigmatic beginning' onward, including some references outside the New Testament to some Greek texts after the New Testament.

D. Hellholm describes 'Vorgeformte Tauftraditionen und deren Benutzung in den Paulusbrieffen', a survey of pre-formed baptismal traditions in Paul and their rhetorical function in

his argumentation in 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Romans. Hellholm identifies formulas of naming, of incorporating, of justifying, of being clothed over and of identifying; 1 Corinthians 12:13 might have been treated in more detail. T. Vegge addresses baptismal phrases in the 'Deuteropauline Epistles' (Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Timothy and Titus) and their function in the argument of these letters. Both essays on Pauline literature have a specific focus; one misses a survey article on the theology of baptism in the *Corpus Paulinum*.

J. Schröter studies baptism in the Acts of the Apostles, including the place of baptism in Luke's theology of history, baptism as enablement for witness and as entry into the community of believers, baptism in the name of Jesus, the baptism of John and the reception of the Spirit, baptism as the opening of the people of God for gentiles, the baptisms of the Ethiopian in Acts 8 and the baptism of Paul as exceptional cases, and the use of traditional material in the Lukan baptism narratives. On this subject see also the detailed study of the late F. Avemarie, *Die Tauferszählungen der Apostelgeschichte: Theologie und Geschichte* (WUNT 139; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002). More attention should have been given to the baptism of household leaders who were baptised together with their houses (Acts 16:15, 31-33; see also 11:14 and 18:8). Some scholars have argued that such 'household baptisms' obviously included not only most or all adult or adolescent members of the household but also children and infants. They see in these household baptisms the biblical warrant for infant baptism. Other scholars emphasise that the contexts of these events mention proclamation of the gospel and conversion; therefore, obviously, only people who had come to faith were baptised. In my opinion, both cases are *argumenta ex silentio* and cannot be verified. The social, religious, political and economical significance of houses/households and the interaction between various members of the core family and extended members have recently been studied in more detail by classical scholars (e.g. solidarity within the family and house, the role of the *pater familias* in the household). It now needs to be seen what fresh light such studies can shed on these cases of household baptism, the people involved and their respective ages.

S. Byrskog, writing on baptism in the Letter to the Hebrews, argues that in Hebrews 6:1-6, 9:9-10 and 10:21-23 baptism is understood as initiation, i.e. as a christological, eschatological and

non-repeatable event:

The baptism of the believers was in distinction to other baptisms of such great importance for the new life of the believer that its rejection would mean nothing but final destruction (602).

H. Moxnes contributes ‘Because of “the Name of Christ”: Baptism and the Location of Identity in 1 Peter’, arguing for the centrality of 1 Peter 3:18-22 and relating baptism to the structure and composition of 1 Peter. To be placed ‘in Christ’ functions as a spatial metaphor in this letter. Moxnes suggests that the conflict with the world described in the letter should be understood as dislocation of identity and displacement as stigmatisation and shame. The readers experience displacement and have received a new place ‘in Christ’: the baptismal metaphor of being ‘in Christ’ in the argument of 1 Peter derives from the presupposition that ethnic identity is fluid and can be changed; at the same time it presupposes that through baptism one is placed in an identity that is stable and stronger than any previous ethnic identity (624; see also K.-H. Ostmeyer, *Taufe und Typos: Elemente und Theologie der Tauftypologie in 1. Korinther 10 und 1. Petrus 3* [WUNT II.119; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000]).

U. Schnelle examines anointing, Spirit and baptism in 1 John; he addresses the historical situation of the letter and its confrontation with heretics. Schnelle further describes charisma in the cultural environment of the letter and its use in 1 John, and the relationship between charisma and Spirit in 1 John. In his essay ‘Matthew 28:9-20 and Mark 16:9-20: Different Ways of Relating Baptism to the Joint Mission of God, John the Baptist, Jesus, and their Adherents’, K.M. Hartvigen examines the authenticity and genre of both passages and offers a detailed comparison. Baptism is discussed in relation to Christology, ecclesiology and eschatology. Hartvigen reflects on the oral performance of the Gospels, on baptism in all of Matthew and Mark and suggests in closing that baptism serves as a link between the gospel world and the real world of members of the audience. T. Karlsen Seim scrutinises the baptismal reflections in the Fourth Gospel, discussing the baptismal practices of John and Jesus, the expression ‘generation from above’ in John 3 and the significance of the life-giving Spirit. Finally, O. Wischmeyer discusses the hermeneutical aspects of baptism in the New Testament. She analyses the commonali-

ties and differences between Paul, Mark, Matthew, Acts, John and late New Testament texts. A similar summary and analysis of the *theological* and *sociological* aspects of baptism in the New Testament would have been welcome.

In this part on the New Testament, Romans 6:1-11 would have deserved an essay of its own. (It is treated in some detail by Hellholm, 442-452, 459-462, 468-470.) The same applies perhaps also to Ephesians 4:5 (some treatment by Vegge, 517-536). In addition, an article might also have addressed the question of infant baptism and the New Testament. On relatively few occasions children are in view in the narratives and letters of the New Testament. While children in antiquity in general have received more attention in recent research, the question of infant baptism in the New Testament seems to have been settled or considered inconclusive by and large since the fierce and detailed controversies between by K. Aland, K. Barth, J. Jeremias and others between the 1950s and the 1970s. In current scholarship there is consensus that infant baptism does not appear in the New Testament. In view of the debate over infant baptism since the Reformation, of this controversy and of the continued significance of baptism in the ecumenical discourse, it is noteworthy that the present project does not include an article on infant baptism *in the New Testament*. (For infant baptism in the Christian apocrypha, see below.) This observation is telling in a number of ways. The New Testament does not indicate whether and how the children of believers should be initiated into the community of faith prior to their own personal repentance and faith (Acts 2:38). With few exceptions the addressees of the New Testament were first generation converts; the integration of their offspring into the community is not in view. Therefore, not on the basis of any New Testament evidence but led by dogmatic and ecclesial interests, several cases have been argued for a ‘biblical’ foundation of the practice of infant baptism as a valid sacrament and initiation rite for infants.

## Early Church

*Volume 2* starts in *Part five* with a detailed coverage of ablution, initiation and baptism in the patristic period. A. Lindemann writes on ‘Zur frühchristlichen Taufpraxis: Die Taufe in der *Didache*, bei Justin und in der *Didaskalia*’. He concludes

The texts hardly reflect the understanding of baptism or even an explicit “theology of baptism”; rather they reflect the baptismal practices in early Christian communities, probably in Syria and Rome (767).

D.-A. Koch describes the interpretation of baptism in Ignatius and the Epistle of Barnabas; his discussion includes what Ignatius says about the baptism of Jesus and of Christians, Barnabas 6:8-18, baptism as the gift of the water of life in Barnabas 11 and baptism in relation to cult metaphors in Barnabas. V. Blomkvist studies the teaching on baptism in the Shepherd of Hermas, including the themes of baptism and *metanoia*, baptism in the allegory of the tower and references in *Visio* III and *Similitudo* IX.

E.-M. Becker contributes a study of baptism in Marcion, including baptism according to *Adversus Marcionem*, baptism according to Tertullian’s *De baptismo* and Marcion’s understanding of the meaning of the *Apostolikon* and of the Gospel. In ‘Baptism among the Valentinians’, E. Thomassen surveys the practice of baptism, the value of baptism and its components – the value of the ritual in general, the relative value of water baptism and anointing, the meaning of baptism –, redemption, Jesus’ baptism as a model, the bridal chamber and the union with angels and other ideas associated with baptism in this group. W. Tabbernee addresses baptism and initiation in the Montanist movement, paying attention to the baptismal formula of the Montanists, to the synod of Iconium, to Cyprian and his interaction with Montanism in North Africa, to related North African inscriptions, to the cult of the martyr Montanus, to Montanist baptism in Phrygia, to rebaptism and to baptism of or on behalf of the dead.

Under the title ‘Simplicity and Power’, O. Norderval reads Tertullian’s *De Baptismo* and examines the historical context of the treatise, Tertullian’s theology of baptism, the actual baptismal rite and baptismal regulations. H.F. Hägg covers baptism in Clement of Alexandria: the baptismal season and the catechumenate, Jesus’ own baptism as a paradigm as understood by Clement, baptism as purification of sins and the question of hereditary guilt, baptism as restoration and new birth and as instrumental in perfection and enlightenment. G.A. Hällström asks ‘More Than Initiation? Baptism According to Origen of Alexandria’. He discusses Origen’s terminology and background and his statements regarding the

baptism of Jesus, the purpose of baptism, infant baptism, the post-baptismal life and baptism and Platonism.

In ‘Initiation in the *Apostolic Tradition*’, A. Ekenberg examines textual problems, the understanding of the initiation process, the meaning attributed to baptism (baptism and conversion, escaping evil forces, initiation and community, forgiveness of sins and new birth). The essay closes with an English translation of the *Apostolic Tradition* 15–21. Ekenberg notes that

Considerable stress is laid in it on initiation as a process of sincere break with the initiate’s former life, and with the demonic forces thought to dominate non-believing human existence, as well as on his or her incorporation into the Christian community. Baptism itself is conceived of both as an act of confession of faith and as an experience of the saving grace of God, forgiving sins and bestowing new life. (1034)

E.E. Popkes comments on ‘Die Tauftheologie Cyprians’, covering the range of baptismal theology in Cyprian’s writings, the relationship between water baptism and ‘blood’ baptism in persecution and martyrdom, Cyprian’s position in the controversy about baptism administered by heretics and Cyprian’s Letter 73 as the most important source for his baptismal theology. E. Wehnert sketches ‘Taufvorstellungen in den Pseudoklementinen’, describing the novel and its origin, the picture and understanding of baptism in its various literary layers and its portrayal of John the Baptist. M. Lattke first briefly surveys Syriac Christianity until Chalcedon and then studies Aphrahat’s writings and sources, the allusions and quotations from the New Testament, terminology, definitions of circumcision and baptism, the baptism of Jesus, belief in baptism, baptism and belief, baptism understood as second circumcision, second birth, washing and remission of sins, baptism and marriage/celibacy and finally baptism and the Holy Spirit.

S. Seppälä addresses ‘Baptismal Mystery in St. Ephrem the Syrian and *Hymnen de Epiphania*’. Discussion includes Ephrem’s *Hymns* and the baptismal event, the baptism of Christ as cosmic mystery, mysticism of immersion and oil, the pneumatic, the Trinitarian, paschal and personal dimensions of baptism, baptism as a call to struggle and the use of biblical imagery of paradise and other Old Testament imagery for baptism. In his essay on Cyril of Jerusalem, J. Day introduces the



*Catechetical Lectures* and the *Letter of Macarius*, analyses the Jordan event as theological framework and describes the liturgy of baptism in the *Catechetical Lectures* including ritual sequence, ministers, pre-immersion rituals, the seal, the actual immersion, anointing, imposition of hands and transitoral rituals; he also addresses the baptismal liturgy of the *Mystagogical Catecheses*. I.L.E. Ramelli describes the significance of baptism in Gregory of Nyssa's theology and its orientation to eschatology.

In 'Iohannes Chrysostomus: Die zehn Gaben ... der Taufe', R. Brändle comments on particular elements of the Antiochene theology of baptism, on aspects of John Chrysostom's understanding of baptism, on his *Sermo ad neophytes* and on the relationship between baptism and original sin. R. Aasgaard examines the views of Ambrose and Augustine on baptism and the construction of Christian identity; he analyses Ambrose's treatises *The Sacraments* and *The Mysteries* and Augustine's Easter *Sermones*. Baptism is employed as a boundary marker for the neophytes regarding their past or relating to outsiders in the present. Aasgaard concludes that

for both Ambrose and Augustine, baptism plays a crucial part in their understanding of Christian identity and in their strategies for shaping and strengthening such an identity. (1277)

In 'The Efficacy of Baptism in Augustine's Theology', J. Patout Burns outlines the African conflicts over baptism (Tertullian, Cyprian, the *Treatise on Rebaptism*, the Donatist conflict, Optatus of Melvis) and describes Augustine's theology of baptism, including baptism in unity and schism, baptismal consecration and sanctification, the minister of baptism, baptism in special circumstances and baptism in the Pelagian controversy.

O. Hesse traces 'Der Streit über die Wirkung der Taufe im frühen Mönchtum: Die Taufe bei Makarios/Symeon, Markos Eremites und den Messalianern', offering a sketch of the various early monastic baptismal theologies. Following this, H. Lundhaugh addresses baptism in the monasteries of Upper Egypt. He surveys baptism in the *Pachomian Corpus* and the *Writings of Shenoute*, and compares both positions.

These studies of individual fathers and wider movements in the ancient church are followed in *Part six* by thematic surveys. C. Strecker writes on 'Taufrituale im frühen Christentum und in der Alten Kirche: Historische und ritualwissenschaftli-

che Perspektiven'. He covers baptismal rituals in the first four centuries and shows the usefulness of approaches based on ritual theory under the headlines 'transformation – liminality', 'embodiment – habitus' and 'cultural performance'. In 'Seal and Baptism in Early Christianity', K.O. Sandnes examines the seal as a non-religious idea and as a mark of branding expressing belonging, authority, protection and obligation. He also discusses 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Shepherd of Hermas (*Visio* 3, *Similitudo* 8-9), the seal and Exodus 12 in Melito of Sardis' *On Pascha* 14-17, the seal in 2 Clement, in Thecla and in the Acts of Thomas. H.-U. Weidemann analyses the close link between 'Taufe und Taufeucharistie: Die postbaptismale Mahlgesellschaft in Quellen des 2. und 3. Jahrhunderts'. He describes baptismal Eucharist in Justin Martyr, the process of the initiation of pagans to the Eucharist in the *Didache*, baptism as the initiation to ascetic table fellowship in various apocryphal acts, in the Pseudo-Clementine writings and the references to milk and honey in the *Traditio Apostolica*.

H. Löhr comments on 'Kindertaufe im frühen Christentum: Beobachtungen an den neutestamentlichen Apokryphen'. He summarises the possible references to infant baptism in the New Testament Apocrypha, the direct references, the *oikos* formula, mass baptisms, the understanding of baptism and infant baptism in *Pseudo-Clement*, to conclude that

the motifs and concepts of baptism which appear in the source do not necessarily require the baptism of young children and infants. ... One cannot say that the baptism of children or infants does not appear in early Christianity. But in remembering the beginnings, as it is reflected in various sources, this practice does not play a significant role. Perhaps even more telling is the fact that this practice is not reflected theologically (1547-1548).

In 'Das Taufbekenntnis in der frühen Kirche', R. Staats addresses confession, faith and symbol as key notions, the relationship between public confession and confession in baptismal liturgy, the Credo as confession of the church, the baptism of individuals, the renouncing of evil and pledging loyalty to Christ. He further discusses 'one baptism' in the Apostolic Creed, offers comparison of ancient church apologetic and confession, describes particular forms in the Christian Orient and analyses the *Nicaenum* as ecumenical text.

The final *Part seven* contains contributions on archaeology and art history: O. Brandt, 'Understanding the Structures of Early Christian Baptisteries'; D. Korol and J. Rieckesmann, 'Neues zu den alt- und neutestamentlichen Darstellungen im Baptisterium von Dura-Europos'; R.M. Jensen, 'Baptismal Practices at North African Martyrs' Shrines'; H. Schneider, 'Die Entwicklung der Taufbecken in der Spätantike'; D. Apostolos-Cappadona, "'I understand the mystery, and I recognize the sacrament": On the Iconology of Ablution, Baptism, and Initiation' and M.M. Mitchell, 'The Poetics and Politics of Christian Baptism in the Abercius Monument'.

*Volume 3* contains 104 colour images and illustrations related to the articles in volumes one and two, lists of technical terms in Greek, Latin and other ancient languages, an index of modern authors, subjects and passages, and a list of the editors and contributors to this substantial enterprise.

### Evaluation

These three volumes are a milestone in the scholarly study of the occurrences, the interrelationship and the significance of ablu-tion, initiation and baptism in the period under discussion; any further discussion cannot but take note of them. The essays testify in great detail to the richness and vitality of the New Testament and patristic reflection on baptism and baptismal practices. A wealth of information and theological reflection on the ancient sources is gathered in these volumes which can help us to understand the theology and practice of the ancient church.

As these volumes focus on antiquity, they should be supplemented by further studies on the subject in the sixth and seventh century up to the period of John of Damascus, according to Marksches in his introductory essay. This would be in line with recent attempts to stretch the period under discussion from more narrowly understood 'patristic' studies to late ancient studies. Such a supplementary quest should include an essay on the early Islamic responses to ablu-tion, initiation and baptism. It would also be interesting to take the discussion further in time and area in order to understand how the heritage regarding these topics was developed in the Middle Ages, the Reformation era and so on. Furthermore, one should examine how the ancient heritage changed and was adapted when Christianity ventured further beyond the boundaries of the Hellenistic-

Roman world, into Asia and, later, Northern Europe. Obviously, the search broadens even further with the spread of Christianity to new shores from the fifteenth century onwards.

The essays indicate that understanding ablu-tion, initiation and baptism is no longer a particularly *theological* quest but a field wide open for interdisciplinary research. A distinct historical interest (history and phenomenology of religion) and several minor quests are evident. Some essays are heavily indebted to the questions and methods of cultural studies and sociology and as such offer welcome and fresh perspectives. The project is strong on detailed descriptions and analyses of the ancient evidence but apart from the introductory essay by Marksches (and perhaps Wischmeyer's hermeneutical reflections), there are no summary articles or attempts at a synthesis. It is left to the readers to draw out the theological implications; for example, what is unique about Christian baptism in view of the wide spread of ablu-tions and initiation practices in the ancient world. An attempt to do so does not seem to be the interest of the scholars involved. These volumes thus testify to the postmodern shift in the humanities in general and in biblical studies in specific, in theo-logical faculties and indirectly also in the church.

### Other books

In the recent third volume of the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2011), baptism is discussed in six sections: L. Hartmann writes about baptism in the New Testament (Greek terminology, John's baptism, Jesus' baptism by John, baptism in early Christian communities, Paul, the so-called Deuteropauline letters, the Acts of the Apostles, 1 Peter, Hebrews, Matthew 28:16-20, John, Mark 16:9-20). The entry on baptism in Christianity by B. D. Spinks covers baptism as seen by the Greek and Latin Fathers, Orthodox Churches and early medieval times, medieval times and the Reformation era, modern Europe and America. In closing Spinks briefly refers to developments in the non-Western world:

Newer churches in Asia and Africa have questioned whether they should simply accept adaptations of products of European culture, whether from the older age of imperialism or more recent times. Some have sought riches in their own cultural rites of initiation that could

be incorporated in rites of Christian baptism. F. Kabasele Lumbala, for example, describes a rite of adult baptism in Zaire, where the renunciation entails the baptizand lying down on a mat and being covered with banana leaves while a song of penitence or mourning is struck up. During the baptism incense is wafted around and an elaborate conferring of a new name takes place (463).

Two further examples are briefly described, one from Sri Lanka (a contextualised baptismal rite from the Christian Workers' Fellowship) and one from African-American congregations (463-464).

The third entry, on baptism in Judaism by R. Chazan, merely deals with medieval Jewish (polemical) responses to Christian baptism; neither here nor in the section on baptism in the New Testament is there any reference to proselyte bap-

tism or to the relationship of John's or Christian baptism to rites of ablution (cf. the entries 'Ablutions I-III' in volume I, columns 108-120; here one looks in vain for Islamic reactions to Christian baptism). The remaining sections are on baptism in literature (J. F. Keuss), in the visual arts (M. O'Kane) and in film (J. DeCou). Cross reference is made to the entries 'Baptism of Jesus', 'Baptisteries', 'Baptists', 'Confirmation', 'Infant Baptism' and 'John the Baptist'.

Also of interest are the substantial monograph by E. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) with over 900 pages and the short survey by C.L. Christian and R. Olbrich (eds.), *Die Taufe: Einführung in Geschichte und Praxis* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008).

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