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The Ongoing "Use" of Baptism: A Hole in the Baptist (Systematic) Baptistery?[1]

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The apostle Paul uses baptism as a pedagogical sign at several points in his letters. That is, he uses baptism to teach his readers about specific realities, especially their union with Christ and its implications for sanctification and the Christian life (e.g. Gal 3, Rom 6, Col 2–3). After establishing a biblical case for an ongoing use of baptism in the Christian life and the church's communication of the truths surrounding the Christian life, I will demonstrate that while certain traditions (e.g., Presbyterian and Lutheran) have long recognized an ongoing "use" for baptism in the life of the believer, the notion of a "use" for baptism is muted among influential, relatively recent, Baptist Systematic Theologies. Emphasizing the aspect of profession, credobaptists have tended to relegate baptism to the past tense. Describing this tendency, Stanley Grenz writes, "It is interesting to note … that many Baptists, whose denominational name derives from the ordinance, often view this act [i.e., baptism] as having no real importance beyond forming the entrance into the local church."[2]

I will consider how influential, relatively recent, Baptist Systematic Theology texts have dealt with this concept (if at all).[3] Specifically I will consider the six influential, Baptist Systematic Theologies by Daniel L. Akin, James Leo Garrett, Jr., Stanley Grenz, Wayne Grudem, Millard Erickson, and James Wm. McClendon, Jr.[4] These texts are broad representatives of Baptist theology and include both single and multi-volume texts. This survey will demonstrate a pattern of neglect toward the ongoing "use" of baptism in

[1]This article was presented in nascent form at the 2018 Southeast Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (Charleston Southern University, Charleston, SC).

[2]Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 515.

[3]"Relatively recent" here means 1980's to present.

[4]Daniel L. Akin, ed., *Theology for the Church*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014); James Leo Garrett, Jr. *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, 2 vols. (vol. 1, North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 1990; vol. 2, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986).

discussions of baptism proper. It will also show that in most cases baptism is overlooked in developing the loci of union with Christ and sanctification, two areas in which the ongoing use of baptism is readily identified.[5] In this second sense, the issue of systematic theological method is raised as well. If baptism has a legitimate ongoing role as a pedagogical sign in the Christian life, what role might baptism play pedagogically for integrating various loci in Systematic Theology?[6]

In sum, this article will argue that baptism has an ongoing use in the life of a believer, demonstrate that this use has largely been overlooked in popular, Baptist Systematic Theologies, consider the implications of this use of baptism for Baptist systematic theological development, and offer modest proposals for future work.

Biblical-Theological Foundation for the Ongoing Use of Baptism[7]

In this section, we seek to establish the foundational claim that baptism has an ongoing role and function in the life of the believer—a role and function that is firmly rooted in the New Testament. The apostle Paul uses baptism as a pedagogical sign at several points in his letters. That is, he uses baptism to teach his readers about specific realities, especially their union with Christ and its implications for sanctification and the Christian life (e.g. Gal 3, Rom 6, Col 2–3).

For example, in Romans 6, the apostle Paul anticipates an antinomian distortion to the message of grace he has expounded in the preceding chapters: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?" (Rom 6:1).[8] He responds by citing the meaning of baptism and its ethical implications:

> May it never be! How shall *we who died to sin* [οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ] still live in it? Or do you not know that *all of us who* [ὅσοι] have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized

[5]Arguably the entirety of the Christian faith is summarized in baptism. Thomas Oden has aptly commented that "Christian theology [is] best thought of largely as a commentary on baptism." Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987–1992), 1:181, and "The history of Christian theology is best understood as an extended commentary on the baptismal formula," Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 1:202. Sharing Oden's position on this point, it is my conviction that all the loci of Systematic Theology intersect in the ordained sign of baptism and are subsequently rehearsed in the continuing sign of the Lord's Supper. Nonetheless, drawing out these lines of connection for all the major loci extends beyond the scope of this article.

[6]While the focus is upon Baptist Systematic Theologies, the implications for this discussion extend beyond this denominational territory.

[7]This section (along with the following two sections) draws from my (currently) unpublished dissertation: "The Relationship Between Baptism, Catechesis, and Entrance to The Church: An Argument for a Theological Catalyst" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 103–06.

[8]Unless noted otherwise, all quotations are from the NASB.

> into His death? Therefore *we have been buried* [συνετάφημεν] with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so *we* too *might walk* [ἡμεῖς … περιπατήσωμεν] in newness of life. For if *we have become* [γεγόναμεν] united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly *we shall* also *be* [ἐσόμεθα] in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we [ἡμᾶς] would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin (Rom 6:2–7; emphasis added).

The first person, plural clauses of these verses indicate Paul's assumption that his hearers are baptized. George Beasley-Murray rightly notes that these phrases "self-evidently … include Paul and *all* his readers, otherwise his argument against the allegedly antinomian effect of the doctrine of justification by faith falls to the ground."[9] Further, not only is baptism an assumed common experience, Paul uses baptism as a pedagogical sign or paradigm of Christian identity. That is, baptism functions here to teach or communicate the realities and pattern of the Christian life, a life rooted and shaped by Christ's person and work.

In Romans 6, Paul recalls the baptismal imagery of the past and connects it to the present tense of Christian living. He presents the baptismal imagery as the way in which believers are to understand their new identity in Christ: "Even so consider [λογίζεσθε] yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11). The imperative "consider" is in the present tense. Thus, it is to be an ongoing way of thinking, and baptism is the sign that summarizes the truth of such thinking.[10] In other words, baptism is a pedagogical sign that Paul uses to remind his readers of their identity.

Paul's use of baptismal imagery to illustrate and teach his readers about the new, ethical reality of the Christian life is not limited to Romans 6. In fact, George Beasley-Murray notes that Paul's appeal for a life shaped by the reality signified in baptism is "most extensively developed in Colossians 2:20–3:13."[11] Paul reminds the believers in Colossae that they "[have] been *buried with Him in baptism*, in which you were also *raised up with Him* through faith in the working of God" (Col 2:12; emphasis added). On the basis of their baptism into Christ's death ("If you have died with Christ"; v. 20), Paul admonishes believers to avoid new regulations such as "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (v. 21). Further, utilizing baptismal-resur-

[9]George Beasley-Murrary, "Baptism," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 60; emphasis original. He notes similar assumptions by Paul concerning his Christian audience in Gal 3:26–28, Col 2:12, 1 Cor 12:13, and Col 2:20–3:15.

[10]Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 380.

[11]Beasley-Murray, "Baptism," 64.

rection imagery, he exhorts, "Therefore if *you* have been *raised up with Christ*, keep seeking [ζητεῖτε] the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1; emphasis added). As in Romans 6:11 where believers are told to consider themselves dead to sin, the main verb ζητεῖτε [keep seeking] is a present, active, indicative, second-person, plural, indicating the ongoing, *corporate* nature of the action (i.e., "you all keep seeking"). Paul here calls the Colossian believers to an *ongoing* manner of life lived *together* that is shaped by baptism.

In light of the new ethical reality signified in baptism, Paul continues, "Therefore consider [lit. "put to death"][12] the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed" (Col 3:5). Because of the execution of the old man and resurrection of the new man, believers are to "put … aside" (NASB), "get rid of" (NRSV; see, NIV), "put … away" (ESV), or "to put off" (KJV; Col 3:8; ἀπόθεσθε) the practices of the old self and "put on" (Col 3:10; ἐνδυζάμενοι) the practices of the new self (see, Col 3:8–17). Thus, this new ethical reality is summed in the baptismal sign, a sign which plays an ongoing pedagogical role in the life of believers. Baptism is a sign of these realities, and it is to be used by the believer to remember those realities and subsequently live them out.

How and Why Baptism Is of Such Great Use to the Believer

Recognizing that baptism has an ongoing role in the life of a believer raises the questions of "how?" and "why?" baptism is of such use. Theologically, we can recognize that baptism is a symbol that is dense with meaning. Standing at the headwaters of the Reformation Martin Luther writes,

> In baptism, … every Christian has enough to study and practice all his or her life. Christians always have enough to do to believe firmly what baptism promises and brings—victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts. In short, the blessings of baptism are so boundless that if our timid nature considers them, it may well doubt whether they could all be true.[13]

Southern Baptist theologians will take exception to much of Luther's baptismal theology (esp., baptismal regeneration and affirmation of infant

[12]The word translated "consider … as dead" (Νεκρώσατε) by the NASB is different than that used in Rom 6:11 for "consider (λογίζεσθε) yourselves." The NRSV, ESV, NIV all render Νεκρώσατε as "put to death"; similarly, the KJV renders it "mortify."

[13]Martin Luther, *Large Catechism* (1529), in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. and trans. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles P. Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 461. A similar example is found in the Roman tradition, "Baptism is justly called by us the Sacrament of faith, by the Greeks, the mystery of faith, because it embraces the entire profession of the Christian faith." *Catechism of the Council of Trent: For Parish Priests*, trans. with notes by John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan (Charlotte: TAN Books, 1982), 240.

baptism). Despite obvious points of disagreement, credobaptist traditions can agree with Luther that the theological mysteries of baptism (even in the variety of ways in which they are understood) are inexhaustible. That is, the ongoing use of baptism is not simply a remembrance of one's identification with Jesus as his disciple, it is a remembrance of the entirety of the Christian faith and all that God has done for him or her in salvation. There is a theological depth to baptism that suits it for its ongoing pedagogical function. This theological depth can be illustrated in five brief observations that touch major loci of Systematic Theology, specifically theology proper, Christology (person and work), salvation (objective and subjective), ecclesiology, and eschatology.

First, relating to theology proper, baptism is Trinitarian. In Matthew, the apostles, and by extension the church, are commanded to make disciples by "baptizing … in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).[14] Further, Jesus's baptism in the Jordan by John stands in the background behind all Christian baptism (Matt 3:13–17).[15] Here the Spirit descends (v. 16), resting upon Jesus, and the Father declares from heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:17). Thus, apart from any assertion of sacramental efficacy, the Trinitarian background and formula of baptism alone indicates the theological depth of this rite.

Second, relating to Christology, baptism displays core aspects of Christ's person and work. On the one hand, the rite as a whole puts forward the atoning work of Christ: his death, burial, and victorious resurrection over sin, death, and the Devil. Connecting these realities to baptism, Paul writes, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Col 2:12; see v. 15 for the aspect of triumph). On the other hand, baptism also recall truths of Christ's *person*. The theological themes of death and burial connected to baptism presuppose Christ's incarnate person, for God alone is immortal (1 Tim 1:17; 6:16) and only mortal man may die. The theological theme of resurrection connected to baptism affirms his incarnation as well, for he was raised bodily from the dead. Southern Baptists are immersionists,[16] and the baptismal actions of this mode—immersion (placing under) and emersion (drawing out)—display core aspects of Christ's

[14]Even baptism administered in Jesus's name only, so long as it is within an orthodox frame of reference, is inherently Trinitarian. Michael Reeves aptly notes, "when you proclaim Jesus, the Spirit-anointed Son of the Father, you proclaim the Triune God." Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 37–38.

[15]For an alternative view, see John Hammett, *40 Questions about Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 71–72, 75. Even if one disagrees with me at this point, the Trinitarian shape of Christian baptism stands on the foundation of Matt 28 alone. Nonetheless, it seems doubtful to me that Matthew's compositional strategy fails to bring Jesus's baptism and Christian baptism into close relation.

[16]"VII. Baptism and the Lord's Supper" in Baptist Faith and Message 2000, accessed 21 November 2018, http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp.

person and work.[17] Thus, the person and work of Christ are intimately linked with baptism.

Third, relating to the doctrine of salvation, baptism is a visible portrayal of conversion (subjective) and union/identification with Christ (objective). As an act of obedience, baptism clearly manifests one's conversion and discipleship unto Christ. Submission to baptism visibly affirms Jesus' declaration, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18). Commenting on baptism in the name of Jesus as found in Acts, Beasley-Murray notes that when connected to such a formula "submi[ssion] to [baptism] becomes a confession of trust in Him."[18] Moreover, baptism is a command of the risen Christ (Matt 28:19). While there is evidence that Jesus and his disciples baptized persons during his ministry (see, John 3:22 and 4:1–2), the command to be baptized as a means of becoming a disciple is not given until *after* Jesus's resurrection. The post-resurrection timing of his command to be baptized is significant for recognizing that baptism is itself a form of profession. To request and receive baptism in response to the command of the *risen* Christ to whom "all authority [in heaven and on earth] has been given" (Matt 28:18) is to profess one's faith in his resurrection and the legitimacy of his lordship.

Further, baptism signifies one's cleansing from sin and union with Christ. Beasley-Murray notes, "Cleansing is the primary meaning of baptism in all religious groups that have practiced it."[19] Similarly, Hammett observes, "While it is worded in slightly different ways, cleansing or purification or forgiveness of sins is one of the most widely agreed upon aspects of the meaning of baptism, included in Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Baptist formulations."[20] As it relates to union with Christ, Paul writes, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal 3:26–27). Thomas Schreiner comments, "Verse 26 says we know we are Christ's if we have faith. And v. 27 says that those who are baptized have clothed themselves with Christ. In other words, baptism signifies that one is united to Christ."[21] The baptismal actions (immersion/emersion) administered to the particular

[17]Immersion is commonly argued for on the basis of its correspondence with the meaning of baptism (e.g., David Allen, "'Dipped for Dead:' The Proper Mode of Baptism," in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, eds. Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008], 104–05). Admittedly one may be a credobaptist and not be an immersionist. However, the connection between baptism and the realities described here should find broad acceptance among all credobaptists.

[18]George Beasely-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 101.

[19]Beasely-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 104; see also, Hammett, *40 Questions*, 117–18.

[20]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 117; see, 1 Pet 3:21, Acts 2:38; 22:16. How the rite of baptism is related to this cleansing is of course not a matter of consensus across denominations.

[21]Thomas R. Schreiner, "Baptism in the Epistles," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, 67–96 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 89.

individual, signify his or her union with Christ. Baptism is not merely a reenactment of *Christ's* death, burial, and resurrection, but it demonstrates the *identification and solidarity (i.e. union) of the baptizand with Christ and vice versa*.[22]

Through its visible portrayal of union with Christ, baptism displays the profound truth of the glorious exchange between Christ and the new disciple. Luther, speaking of the benefits that follow faith, describes this exchange vividly, "[Faith] unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom … it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly, the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own."[23] In depicting union with Christ, baptism illustrates the exchange of the baptizand's sin, condemnation, and death with the righteousness, acceptance, and life of Christ. What is declared of Christ at the Jordan is true for all who are united with him by faith: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:17).

Fourth, baptism manifests the baptizand's union with the body of Christ, the church, and its mission in the world. The Baptist Faith and Message connects baptism to ecclesiology, stating, "Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper."[24] The close association of baptism with entrance into the communion of the local church is seen in Acts 2:41–42 where "those who had received [Peter's] word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Subsequently, we see these persons living in community, "continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Christian churches do not practice self-baptism (a.k.a., se-baptism or auto-baptism).[25] A local church administers baptism to persons as a means of making them disciples (Matt 28); as such, it is a rite to be received.[26] Thus, the doctrine of

[22]Insofar as baptism is a public profession of faith the "vice versa" of this statement applies on the basis of Matt 10:32–33 (cp. Luke 12:8) where Jesus declares, "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." See also John 15:5–6 and Gal 2:20 for the idea of mutual indwelling and Christ's union with the believer.

[23]Martin Luther, *On the Freedom of a Christian*, in *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 286.

[24]Baptist Faith and Message 2000, Art. VII.

[25]John Smyth's se-baptism is a notable deviation from this norm. For a discussion of Smyth's se-baptism see Jason K. Lee, *Theology of John Smyth* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 71–74.

[26]The main verb of Matt 28:19–20 is μαθητεύσατε (aorist, active, imperative, plural) "to make a disciple of, teach." According to Daniel Wallace, the participles βαπτίζοντες ("baptizing") and διδάσκοντες ("teaching") are best understood as participles of means, i.e., "the means by which the disciples were to make disciples was to baptize and then to teach." Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 645.

the church—its fellowship and obedient mission in the world—is bound up with this rite as well.[27]

Finally, baptism signifies the eschatological hope of the gospel. Here we begin by recalling what was previously said about Paul's discussion of baptism in Colossians 2–3. Baptism as a sign of future resurrection bears eschatological weight. Nonetheless, Schreiner sees eschatological significance in baptism's association with the washing with and pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5 with Ezek 11:19; 36:25–27; Titus 3:6 with Joel 2:28–29; Isa 44:3),[28] union with Christ the seed of Abraham (3:15–4:7, esp. 3:27–28), and victory over sin (Rom 6:3–4, 9–10).[29] He summarizes, "Baptism, therefore, functions as a reminder of the new eschatological reality that has been obtained with the death and resurrection of Christ."[30] This eschatological reality of resurrection is already present in the life of the believer, but it is also a reality that has not yet been fully realized. As such baptism signifies the already/not yet tension of the Christian life: a life bathed in eschatological hope.

The five preceding observations are not exhaustive. They show, however, that baptism is a rite of significant theological depth. This depth fits the sign of baptism for sustained reflection and an ongoing use both for instruction of disciples and for each disciples' regular remembrance.

The Ongoing Use of Baptism Outside the Baptist Tradition

The ongoing use of baptism finds expression in other denominational traditions. While such an observation is not decisive for my argument, it functions to support the biblical-theological points already made and to illustrate how the ongoing use of baptism has been worked out by others. Two examples will be adduced.

First, the ongoing use of baptism is evident in Luther's thought and that of the tradition that bears his name. For example, in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* Luther argues that it is "proper to restrict the name of sacrament to those promises which have signs attached to them … Hence there are, strictly speaking, but two sacraments in the church of God—baptism and the bread."[31] Here Luther limits the sacraments to "baptism and the bread [the Lord's Supper]," but it was not without deliberation. Luther wrestled with the status of penance as a sacrament.[32] By the end of his treatise, he concludes, "The sacrament of penance, which I added to these two,

[27]For helpful and succinct summary of this point, see Hammett, *40 Questions*, 119–20.

[28]For more discussion on the association of baptism with the gift of the Holy Spirit, see Schreiner's discussion of 1 Cor 12:13, Schreiner, "Baptism in the Epistles," 71–73.

[29]Schreiner, "Baptism in the Epistles," 87–89.

[30]Schreiner, "Baptism in the Epistles," 89.

[31]Martin Luther, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Three Treatises*, trans. A.T.W. Steinhäuser, rev. Frederick C. Ahrens and Abdel Ross Wentz, 113–260 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1970), 258.

[32]Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 132.

lacks the divinely instituted visible sign, and is, as I have said, nothing but a way and a return to baptism."[33] Thus, according to Luther, when a believer repents, he or she is returning to the reality manifested in baptism.[34]

John Mueller, a later Lutheran theologian, picks up on the ongoing pedagogical function and use of baptism, noting that while baptism is not to be administered more than once, it is to be in constant use by the Christian. "Baptism," writes Mueller, "should comfort and exhort the believer through his life (1 Pet 3:21; Gal 3:26–27; Rom 6:3)."[35] He continues, "For this reason the apostles in the New Testament again and again remind Christians of their Baptism … and urge them to heed not only its sweet comfort, but also its great significance for sanctification. *Baptismus semper exercendus est* [Baptism is always practiced]."[36]

Similarly, the Westminster Larger Catechism exemplifies the pedagogical function of baptism when it speaks of "improving" one's baptism. Question 167 asks, "How is our baptism to be improved by us?" It responds,

> The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it [i.e., baptism], and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavouring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.[37]

By "improving" baptism, the catechism does not mean adding new

[33]Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 258.

[34]Jonathan Trigg argues that Baptism in Luther's thought is given what he calls a "present tense" in the life of the believer. It is the starting point to which the believer must continually return. Just as circumcision was an ongoing sign of the covenant, so baptism has an ongoing aspect. See, Jonathan D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 45.

[35]John Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics: A Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers, and Laymen* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934), 496; proof text formats modernized.

[36]Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, 496; e.g., 1 Cor 1:13; Eph 4:5; Col 2:12; 1 Pet 3:21. For a similar statement from the Roman Catholic tradition see, *Catechism of the Council of Trent,* 169.

[37]Westminster Larger Catechism (1647), Q. 167, in *Reformed Confessions: Harmonized*, eds. Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 217, 219.

things to baptism, but rather, it intends that the individual live out more fully the grace-benefits signified and sealed in baptism. To do so, this baptism must be recalled "by serious and thankful consideration."[38] This recollection is specific, not generic; for the believer is to recall its "nature," "ends," "privileges and benefits," and "solemn vow made therein." Baptism, and all it represents, is here portrayed as a reservoir of truth and grace from which one lives the Christian life.

The improvement of baptism envisioned within the Westminster Larger Catechism is not relegated to one's initiation into the church, for it "is to be performed by us all our life long." At this point, the ongoing use of baptism as a pedagogical sign is on display. Those who have received this sign are to recall it and to let the truth it embodies shape them more and more.

With the biblical-theological foundations and historical illustrations of baptism's ongoing use in the life of the believer in place, attention now turns to considering how popular Baptist Systematic Theologies have dealt with this aspect of baptism.

Inspecting the Baptist Systematic Theological Baptistery

In this section we will engage six popular Baptist Systematic Theologies to see how—if at all—they have discussed the "use" of baptism as well as how they have used baptism in their presentation of various loci. In my review of these texts, I looked for if and how the author identified the ongoing use of baptism in his treatment of baptism and how he used baptism to teach and illustrate the doctrines of union with Christ and sanctification.

The following surveys have been ordered in such a way as to highlight the theological lacuna on this issue, moving from weakest to strongest. This grouping will hopefully at once show the need for work on this issue while also drawing together some of the best examples in which the issue is addressed to some degree.

[38]Westminster Larger Catechism (1647), Q. 167, in *Reformed Confessions,* 217, 219. The wording of the catechism at this point reflects a logic that assumes adult baptism or at least the baptism of those older than an infant. This stands in tension with the usual practice of infant baptism. Such a tension between catechesis and the practice of infant baptism has been felt by Roman Catholic liturgists in the wake of liturgical reforms emanating from Vatican II. Those reforms include revisions to infant/children's baptism (1969), confirmation (1971), and adult initiation (1972). In the last reform document—"Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults" (RCIA)—the council laid forth a return to a robust catechumenate that culminates in baptism, confirmation, and first communion. Interestingly, William Harmless writing from within the Roman tradition observes, "[T]he RCIA should, over time, quietly but profoundly challenge the standards and presuppositions that undergird our long-standing habit of infant baptism." William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 14; see also, Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo, 1978), 106.

Millard Erickson: *Christian Theology*

Baptism (Proper). Millard Erickson addresses baptism in Chapter 52 of his *Christian Theology*. Erickson defines baptism as "an act of faith and a testimony that one has been *united with Christ* in his death and resurrection, that one has experienced spiritual circumcision. It is a public indication of one's commitment to Christ."[39] In his discussion he distinguishes signs and symbols, calling baptism a symbol and not a sign. "[Baptism] is a symbol rather than merely a sign," writes Erickson," for it is a graphic picture of the truth it conveys. There is no inherent connection between a sign and what it represents."[40] He illustrates the difference as follows: "It is only by convention, for example, that green traffic lights tell us to go rather than to stop. By contrast, the sign at a railroad crossing is more than a sign; it is also a symbol, for it is a rough picture of what it is intended to indicate, the crossing of a road and a railroad track."[41] He concludes that baptism is a symbol rather than a sign because baptism "actually pictures the believer's death and resurrection with Christ."[42]

Despite baptism's status as a symbol, Erickson's discussion does not address an ongoing use for this symbol in the life of a believer. The use of baptism is functionally relegated to the baptismal event.

Union with Christ and Sanctification. As noted above, Erickson defines baptism in part as a "testimony that one has been *united with Christ* in his death and resurrection, that one has experienced spiritual circumcision."[43] Because of baptism's connection to union with Christ, Erickson judges immersion the "most adequate" mode of baptism because it "most fully preserves and accomplishes the meaning of baptism."[44] He concludes by noting that baptism is "both a sign of the believer's union with Christ and, as a confession of that union, an additional act of faith that serves to cement … more firmly that relationship."[45] Union with Christ is, therefore, clearly a concept Erickson emphasizes in his discussion of baptism. Nonetheless, Erickson does not reference baptism in his earlier discussion of union with Christ (Ch. 45). Similarly, baptism is not referenced in Erickson's chapter on Sanctification (Ch. 46; "The Continuation of Salvation"). Though a symbol of union and commitment to Christ, Erickson does not use baptism to discuss these subjects when facing them directly.

Daniel Akin: *Theology for the Church*

Daniel Akin's edited volume *Theology for the Church* is a collection of essays in systematic theology that are each linked by a specific program of

[39]Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 1028.
[40]Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1028.
[41]Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 1028.
[42]Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 1028.
[43]Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 1028.
[44]Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 1032.
[45]Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 1032.

questions: (1) what does the Bible say? (2) what has the Church believed? (3) how does it all fit together? and (4) how does this doctrine impact the Church today? For the purposes of this article I reviewed the chapters by Mark Dever and Ken Keathley.

Baptism (Proper). In Mark Dever's chapter "The Church" he covers a wide amount of territory including the church's nature, attributes, marks, polity, discipline, mission and purpose, and culmination at the end of time. He develops baptism biblically under the heading of the second Reformation mark of the church: "the right administration of the sacraments."[46] Here he identifies two functions for baptism: (1) the confession of sin and (2) profession of faith.[47] He also notes that it is a sign of a believer's union with Christ.

As it relates to our question, Dever's development of the meaning and function of baptism focuses on the baptismal event. Any ongoing implications are found in his identification of baptism as a prerequisite to participation in the Lord's Supper[48] and his connection of baptism to church membership.[49] Dever covers standard polemical issues related to infant baptism in his historical section. In his systematic summary, Dever observes that Protestant churches, both credobaptist and paedobaptist alike, seek to place faith at the center of the church. Dever of course understands believers' baptism to be the most satisfying way to do this. "Faith," he writes, "shows itself initially in the believer's submission to baptism, and then repeatedly in his or her participation in the Lord's Supper."[50] While baptism and the Lord's Supper are strongly linked via their respective roles in expressing faith in Dever's presentation, he does not clearly identify an ongoing role or "use" of baptism subsequent to its administration.

Union with Christ and Sanctification. The subjects of union with Christ and sanctification are treated in Ken Keathley's chapter entitled "The Word of God: Salvation." Here, Keathley provides a robust discussion of union with Christ. "Since our experiential union with Christ is a spiritual union," he writes, "this reality can be illustrated by tangible examples but not fully explained by them."[51] Thus, while we can know something about our union with Christ, mystery always looms over this doctrine.

Keathley identifies six biblical analogies of union with Christ. They are (1) the Trinitarian relationships (John 17:21, 23), (2) the "stones of a building and chief cornerstone (Eph 2:19–22; 1 Pet 2:4–5)," (3) Adam's relation to humanity and Jesus' relation to the church (Rom 5:12–19; 1 Cor 15:19–49), (4) the vine and branches (John 15:1–17), (5) the marriage of husband to wife (Eph 5:22–23), and, finally, (6) the relation between the head and the

[46]See, Dever, "The Church," in *Theology for the Church*, 615–21.
[47]Dever, "The Church," in *Theology for the Church*, 618.
[48]Dever, "The Church," in *Theology for the Church*, 621.
[49]Dever, "The Church," in *Theology for the Church*, 622.
[50]Dever, "The Church," in *Theology for the Church*, 656.
[51]Keathley, "Salvation," in *Theology for the Church*, 548.

body (Eph 4:15–16).[52] Notably, baptism is not listed among the "tangible examples" of the believer's union with Christ.

When discussing sanctification Keathley points to the believer as "positional[ly] and experiential[ly]" sanctified. However, though he speaks of dying and rising with Christ, baptism is not mentioned. In sum, Keathley's essay does not use baptism within his presentation of either union with Christ or of sanctification.

James Leo Garrett, Jr.: *Systematic Theology*

Baptism (Proper). In his treatment of baptism (Vol. 2, Ch. 73), James Leo Garrett treats a wide variety of topics. After exploring possible historical antecedents to baptism and the biblical references to baptism, he takes up a number of issues under the heading "Systematic Questions with Historical and Contemporary Answers." Here he deals with (a) the baptizand (i.e., infant-believer's baptism debate), (b) the meaning, (c) the mode(s), (d) the administration (i.e., who may baptize, receiving baptism from other denominations, "repairing" baptisms, and the formula of baptism), (e) the necessity, (f) church membership (close vs. open), (g) ecumenism, (h) culture (i.e., baptism as a counter-cultural symbol).[53] Though he earlier acknowledges the ethical implications of baptism in his treatment of Romans 6 in his biblical section,[54] at no point in his later wide-tour of subjects does Garrett discuss the ongoing "use" of baptism.

Union with Christ and Sanctification. In his chapter on baptism, Garrett summarizes the meaning of baptism as a sign encompassing "the believer's identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus; the outward sign of an inner cleansing or of the remission of sins; the sign of the eschatological resurrection of believers; the sign of the believer's entry in the body of Christ; a testimony both to believers and to nonbelievers; and an act of obedience to Christ."[55] Here we see both union with Christ ("identification with") and sanctification (at least positional sanctification in the form of "inner cleansing").

With regard to the sanctification, the ethical implications of baptism are rather underdeveloped in the chapter on baptism. Similarly, Garrett does not mention baptism in his chapter on Sanctification (Ch. 66).[56] Thus, baptism's ongoing use in the Christian life is underdeveloped in this systematic theology as well.

Concerning union with Christ, Garrett has a more to say with regard to baptism. For example, in his discussion of Galatians 3:27, Garrett observes that Paul "connects baptism with putting on Christ" and that it is "associated both with union with Christ and with fellow Christians (3:27–28) and with

[52]Keathley, "Salvation," in *Theology for the Church*, 549.
[53]See, Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:522–36.
[54]Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:519–20.
[55]Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:529.
[56]Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:356–72.

faith (3:26)."[57] However, though baptism is understood to have a connection to union with Christ, it is not mentioned in the "Systematic Formulation" section that deals with union with Christ (Ch. 64).[58]

James Wm. McClendon, Jr.: *Systematic Theology*

James McClendon's three-volume systematic begins with a volume devoted to ethics.[59] Given his integrative structure, I will treat both of our questions together here. In this first volume he describes baptism as an overlapping of the story of Jesus with the story of the baptizand. In baptism, writes McClendon,

> the identification with Jesus as the incarnate, obedient, crucified, and risen one is not merely legal or mystical; it is a *narrative* identification (just as in the resurrection, Jesus' identification with God consists in a narrative linking of his life with the life of God—Rom 1:4). Here, then the baptist vision is at work: "this is that"—our baptisms recapitulate and so claim his resurrection in our own lives afresh.[60]

Baptism is, therefore, the beginning of a whole new way of life; that is, baptism should be understood as "the inception of resurrection morality."[61] McClendon goes on to note, "[T]he New Testament more generally, … often invokes the first committed step, which is baptism, as a basis on which also to require the virtues (and forbid the vices) that accompanied the full scope of Christian practice (Col 3:1–4:6; perhaps 1 Peter)."[62] Importantly, baptism was used by the New Testament authors "to summon converts to a socially accountable newness of life."[63] The ongoing ethical implications of baptism lead McClendon into a reprisal of infant baptism, which he believes undermines baptism as an ethical sign to be remembered.[64]

[57]Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:518.

[58]Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:336–37.

[59]McClendon defends his choice on the basis that (1) "no part of systematic theology stands quite independent; each presupposes the other parts"; (2) dealing with prolegomena first privileges philosophy in a questionable manner; (3) pedagogically, "When the study of systematic theology is understood as preparation for ministry, there is little reason to initiate students into it via that part of systematic theology most abstruse, most remote from daily life, and therefore least congenial. Many students, starting there, quit as soon as they can!" McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 1:42.

[60]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 1:257. McClendon earlier defines the "baptist vision" as "a hermeneutical motto, which is shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community." McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 1:31.

[61]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 1:255.

[62]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 1:258.

[63]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 1:258.

[64]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 1:258. "Christian ethics, … must deplore the intrinsic failure of infant baptism. It becomes a rite neither responsive on the candidate's part or responsible on the administrator's." Idem.

The function and need for baptism to be remembered is repeated in his second volume which deals with doctrine. Here, in fact, baptism is listed alongside prophetic preaching and the Lord's Supper as a remembering sign.[65] McClendon defines the "remembering signs as "repeatable monuments" to salvation-historical realities. Concerning baptism, he states, "Because the Christian rite of baptism recalls the baptism of Jesus and his death and resurrection, it functions as a remembering sign of faith in him."[66] He continues, "Our immersion recollects his death and burial; our overwhelming by the water of baptism recalls the overwhelming of suffering that he endured."[67]

Christian baptism, according to McClendon, involves at least five elements. These elements (the first three carrying over from John's baptism) are as follows:

> (1) entrance into a community awaiting the new age dawning, (2) conversion to that newness as a condition of admission, … (3) God's putting away the sins of each …, (4) the "name" of Jesus (later, the triune name) as the identity mark of each candidate and of the new community itself ("baptized into the name," *eis ton onoma*), and (5) the gift of the Spirit of God to the community and to each member upon his or her baptism.[68]

In short, baptism is a monument prompting a remembrance of entrance into the church, conversion, forgiveness of sins, one's new identity in Christ (and in relation to the Triune God), and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Additionally, McClendon distinguishes symbols from signs. "In the prophetic and baptism heritage baptism is not merely a symbol but a sign, for it is the nature of signs not only to betoken but to do something, to convey something."[69] Thus, he understands baptism as a performative sign. The action of the sign is, however, complex and not unitary; the performative action is three-fold, shared between the baptized, the baptizing community, and God. As McClendon puts it, "In the 'happy' case [of baptism], human action and divine action converge in baptism and indeed are one."[70]

As a remembering sign with performative action in which the baptized person takes part, baptismal administration should foster and be compatible with remembrance. This, according to McClendon, is what makes infant baptism so disastrous. The practice of infant baptism combined with the understanding that "baptism is absolutely unrepeatable" means that the child is "told she may not ever ask for baptism; nor is she permitted to remember her

[65]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:386.
[66]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:381.
[67]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:381.
[68]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:386.
[69]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:388.
[70]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:389.

baptism; whatever else she may do in faith, she may not stand with a faith of her own in the baptismal waters and hear the glad words, 'Upon the profession of your faith I baptize you, my sister, in the name of the Father, and of Jesus God's Child, and of the Spirit of God."[71]

In a later section, McClendon suggests that to participate in the "Lord's Supper" is to "renew their baptismal pledges."[72] Thus, the Lord's Supper is cast as an occasion in which the performative sign of baptism is recalled. McClendon's integrative structure and the fact that he connects baptism so clearly to ethics offers a fruitful and creative example. Union with Christ is not developed in its own section, nor does it seem to play a significant role in McClendon's development of baptism.[73]

Wayne Grudem: *Systematic Theology*

Baptism (Proper). Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* has become a go-to text for college and seminary campuses. While Grudem devotes an entire chapter to "Baptism" (Ch. 49), it is actually his discussion of "Means of Grace within the Church" (Ch. 48) that offers the most relevant discussion for our question.

Grudem defines "the means of grace" as "any activities within the fellowship of the church that God uses to give more grace to Christians."[74] He does not offer a full definition of baptism (proper) in this chapter or in his chapter on baptism, but his view is readily discovered from his presentation. He describes baptism as "a sign of the believer's death and resurrection with Christ (see Rom 6:2–5; Col 2:12)." Further, it is a "physical symbol" of these realities and "our participation in them" as well as the "inward baptism by the Holy Spirit."[75] While baptism is a sign and symbol of these things, the means by which they are realized in the believer's life is *faith*.[76] Thus, he will later state that "baptism is appropriately administered only to those who give a believable profession of faith in Jesus Christ."[77]

Importantly, Grudem affirms, "Since baptism is a physical symbol of the death and resurrection of Christ and our participation in them, it should also give additional assurance of union with Christ to all believers who are

[71]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:391.

[72]McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:410. Interestingly, he suggests that others should be invited to participate in the meal as guests at "'an agape feast' (a familiar term, since the church regularly provides such a meal, especially inviting the hungry in its neighborhood to share").

[73]In his discussion of baptism, he makes a passing reference to baptism and union in a comment on Gal 3:27 on his way to a different point (McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:338).

[74]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 950. He identifies eleven "means of grace": (1) Teaching of the Word, (2) Baptism, (3) The Lord's Supper, (4) Prayer for one another, (5) Worship, (6) Church discipline, (7) Giving, (8) Spiritual gifts, (9) Fellowship, (10) Evangelism, (11) Personal ministry to individuals. He notes that most theologians limit the list to the first three (e.g., Berkhof).

[75]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 954.

[76]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 954.

[77]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 967.

present."[78] Because of its symbolic connection to the inward baptism of the Spirit, he also affirms that "we may expect that the Holy Spirit will ordinarily work alongside the baptism, giving to believers an increasing realization of the benefits of the spiritual baptism to which it points."[79] Though he denies an *ex opere operato* understanding, Grudem cautions that we should not hold that "the Holy Spirit *does not* work through [baptism] and that it is *merely symbolic*."[80] Such activity is, on Grudem's account, moving from faith through baptism. In this way, credobaptism functions as a "means of grace" within the church.

According to Grudem, "where there is genuine faith on the part of the person being baptized, and where the faith of the church that watches the baptism is stirred up and encouraged by this ceremony, then the Holy Spirit certainly does work through baptism, and it becomes a 'means of grace'."[81] Grudem, therefore, affirms an ongoing role for baptism as a means of grace at the point of baptism, both for the one being baptized and for the baptized community observing it. He does not, however, note a use outside of the baptismal event. Even the Lord's Supper is not clearly tied to baptism by Grudem, since he thinks it best to allow all professing believers to participate regardless of their baptism.[82]

Union with Christ and Sanctification. In his discussion of "Union with Christ" (Ch. 43), Grudem only mentions baptism in passing.[83] He comes close to making the connection between baptism and death to sin by quoting Romans 6:4 and 6:11 together, but then focuses attention on the spiritual reality of dying and rising with Christ and does not identify baptism as a key image for understanding it. In short, Grudem does not use baptism to elaborate the doctrine of union with Christ.

In his chapter on Sanctification (Ch. 38), Grudem focuses his attention on the definitive break with sin which begins at the point of conversion and regeneration.[84] He cites verses in Romans 6 but none before verse 11 (e.g., Rom 6:11, 14; 18; 12–13; 17–8). In other words, he does not include baptism as part of this discussion (vv. 3–4). Further, he does not connect these realities of "death to sin" or freedom from sin to the symbol of baptism.[85] In sum, Grudem does not use baptism in his unfolding of sanctification.

[78]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 954.

[79]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 954.

[80]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 954, (emphasis original).

[81]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 954.

[82]Grudem does, however, think "it would seem wise to teach that the ideal situation is for new believers first to be baptized and then to partake of the Lord's Supper." Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 997.

[83]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 842.

[84]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 747.

[85]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 751–52, 54.

Stanley J. Grenz: *Theology for the Community of God*

Baptism (Proper). Grenz offers the strongest treatment in terms of our subject. He speaks of both ordinances as having an "identity forming" role for believers. They are, as he calls them, "vehicles of the Spirit in this identity forming process."[86] He continues, "These acts constitute practices of commitment, by means of which we initially affirm and repeatedly reaffirm our inclusion in the covenant community."[87] Such language points to an ongoing role for both ordinances and indicates that they are working in tandem toward the same end of identity shaping.

Grenz extends this identity-forming role to the corporate level. He does so in three ways. First, the ordinances bring the past to life through their dramatic "retelling" or declaration of the gospel. Second, the ordinances "[facilitate] symbolic participation in the saving events which form the foundation for our identity as persons united with Christ."[88] Third, the ordinances sustain an eschatological hope and vision. He writes, "The acts of commitment are a powerful means of sustaining this vision in us. They provide a symbolic declaration that God will one day bring his work to completion in the world and that our true identity lies in that event: We are what we will be."[89] Thus, the ordinances remind the community of her inherent eschatological nature, keeping it ever before her eyes. Together these community acts of commitment provide a "transcendent vantage point" that enables us to see both the past and the future in the present.[90]

All of what Grenz says about the ordinances in general apply to each ordinance in particular. For example, he will later describe baptism as having an "eschatological orientation."[91] As such baptism looks to the end of our salvation (i.e., "glorification") while also including all points behind (i.e., "initiation into the Christian life") and between (i.e., "sanctification").[92]

Grenz's most significant contribution for our question is found in his section entitled "the impact of baptism."[93] He argues that baptism is an event with ongoing implications and an event that the Spirit will bring back to mind to shape us. The impact of baptism is felt by the baptizand, the congregation, and the world. For our purposes, the first two impacts are most relevant. The impacts of baptism on the one baptized are varied. Grenz writes:

> Baptism ought to have a powerful impact on the one baptized. For this person the celebration of the ordinance should be a day to remember. It should be a powerful motivation for godly living throughout life, as we subsequently recall the day of our baptism

[86]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 517.
[87]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 517.
[88]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 517.
[89]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 518.
[90]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 517–18.
[91]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 522.
[92]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 522.
[93]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 523–24.

> and thereby are reminded both of the commitment we made to Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit sealed to us on that day. Through his repeated reminders of our baptismal experience, the Spirit also admonishes us concerning the importance of living a holy life, a life conforming to the confession we made that day. And he strengthens us in our Christian walk.[94]

There is much to be noted here connected to the ongoing use of baptism. First, Grenz calls the baptismal day a "day to remember" and (a few lines later) an event that one should "subsequently recall."[95] Thus, it is not an act relegated merely to the past.[96] Second, he indicates that the event "should be a powerful motivation for godly living throughout life." Third, this rhythm of memory and motivation is fueled by the recollection of "both the commitment we made to Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit sealed to us on that day." Finally, he asserts that the Holy Spirit will use the memory of this event to urge us on toward holiness in keeping with our baptismal confession. All of which will "[strengthen] us in our Christian walk."

As for its impact on the congregation, the baptism of an individual, Grenz notes, reminds the congregation that sanctification and growth in Christlikeness are lifelong; they begin at regeneration, but they do not stop there. Further, the congregation is summoned to their obligation to help him or her grow and reminded that there are many others who need to hear the gospel. Furthermore, each member is once again summoned to recall his or her "baptismal vow."[97] "Through this reminder," writes Grenz, "the Spirit calls us to renew the covenant with God we made on the day of our baptism (Rom 6:1–2, 11–13). And to dedicate ourselves anew to live a holy life."[98]

Beyond the initial event of baptism, however, where are the reverberations of its "impact" felt? Grenz has identified the baptism of other believers as a distinct occasion of remembering one's own baptism. Nonetheless, there is another key moment at which one's baptism is recalled, namely, the Lord's Supper. Grenz writes, "Through our presence at the Lord's table we publicly confess our loyalty to Christ. Through this act, we are owning once again the pledge or covenant we made at our baptism."[99] In this way, baptism is brought into regular remembrance in the life of the congregation.

[94]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 523–24.

[95]Polemically, Grenz views infant baptism as subversive to this aspect of baptism, see, Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 529.

[96]Grenz will later liken the baptismal event to a wedding: "In a sense, baptism is analogous to a public wedding. For a couple being married, reciting vows in the presence of witnesses becomes a day to remember. It is a focal point for their initial commitment to each other. Their public declaration of covenantal love both strengthens them to live in faithfulness to each other and throughout life draws their attention to the covenant they made on that day. In a similar manner, the Holy Spirit can use our baptism to strengthen our commitment to Christ." Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 527.

[97]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 524.

[98]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 524.

[99]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 539. He observes, "Because presence at the

Union with Christ and Sanctification. Grenz does not have a section devoted to union with Christ. However, some of his most direct and developed statements on union with Christ occur within his discussion of baptism and the Lord's Supper. For example, Grenz describes union with Christ as the chief truth symbolized in baptism. He writes, "Above all, baptism symbolizes our spiritual union with Christ. This union entails our participation in Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday—our death to the old, sinful life and our being raised to new life (Rom. 6:3–8)."[100] He then goes on to describe some of the entailments of baptism's symbolizing of union with Christ. He writes, "The concept of participation in the death of Christ links baptism to the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21), which Christ died to effect … Similarly, baptism is linked to the new birth and the reception of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), for participation in Christ's resurrection means that the Holy Spirit is now present in our lives … [acting] as the pledge and power of our future resurrection (Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:13, 14)."[101] In these ways, Grenz draws a thick line of connection between baptism and union with Christ. Further, within the quote above he traces the web of connections that exist between this sign and many other aspects of salvation and life in Christ.

Grenz does not mention baptism in his discussion about sanctification. However, the resources for doing so are available. In his development of both baptism and the Lord's Supper (as noted in the previous section) he places heavy emphasis upon the ethical demands of one's new identity in Christ. Each time the community administers baptism or the Lord's Supper each onlooking member is reminded of his or her baptismal vow of allegiance and obedience to Christ and called once again to renew it.[102] Thus, baptism could easily be connected to his development of sanctification.

Proposals

As we have shown, baptism has an ongoing, pedagogical function in the life of believers. This function finds sound biblical-theological foundations in the writings of Paul (especially Rom 6; Col 2–3; and Gal 3). As such, it is argued here that this function should factor into the presentations of baptism as well as union with Christ and sanctification—two theological loci that are demonstrably linked to the sign of baptism. Nonetheless, as our survey has shown, there is a hole within the larger body of popular Baptist Systematic Theology texts on this issue. While there are examples of Baptist systematics that have developed the ongoing use of baptism (especially

Eucharist entails our renewal of the covenant with God, baptism properly precedes participation in the Lord's Supper … The reaffirmation of our personal loyalty to Christ inherent in the Lord's Supper presupposes our initial declaration of loyalty made in baptism." Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 540.

[100]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 522.

[101]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 522.

[102]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 539.

Grenz and to a lesser extent Grudem and McClendon), if we narrow our consideration to the top-three, most popular Baptist Systematic Theologies (Grudem, Erickson, and Akin),[103] the results of our query show a clear weakness in presenting and modeling the ongoing use of baptism discussed in the biblical-theological section of this article.

Reasons for this trend are likely legion. At minimum, however, the polemical situation in which Baptists have operated has seemingly bent Baptist Systematic Theologies to focus the majority of attention on the paedobaptism versus credobaptism debate and debates over the sacramental efficacy of baptism. These discussions focus on the event of baptism, and subsequently, they tend to narrow the scope of discussion to the event of administration. Thus, for most of the texts surveyed in this article, the ongoing aspect of baptism often remains untouched or underdeveloped in discussions of baptism proper.

The question now becomes "how might we better account for the ongoing, pedagogical function of baptism in Baptist Systematic Theologies?" As it relates to discussions of baptism proper, we should follow the trajectory set by Grenz (and to a lesser extent Grudem) by developing the ongoing "impact of baptism."[104] John Hammett's discussion of "The Importance of Baptism for a Christian's Life" in his *40 Questions on Baptism and the Lord's Supper* follows Grenz's trajectory and offers a noteworthy example how the ongoing role of baptism could be developed, especially in connection to the baptismal event. Hammett observes that baptism is important as an act of obedience, a source of blessing, and that the subsequent baptismal services within the church are an occasion for renewing one's own baptismal "pledge."[105] The first point is common stock of discussions of credobaptism in Baptist Systematic Theologies. However, the second and third points deserve more attention.

Hammett identifies two major ways in which baptism "benefit[s] the believer." The first benefit is assurance of salvation.[106] He writes,

> I do not believe that baptism is salvific or regenerative. Salvation is by grace through faith. But faith is internal, a decision of the heart. How can one know her faith is genuine? This is where baptism can help, because no one baptizes herself; she is baptized by a church. And baptism, when practiced rightly, is the church's affirmation that her profession of faith is credible; that she gives

[103]The overall Amazon rankings for the six selected Systematic Theologies were as follows: (1) Grudem—10,114; (2) Erickson—68,583; (3) Akin—221,694; (4) Grenz—333,484; (5) Garrett—977,250; (6) McClendon—1,236,358. Statistics acquired through queries conducted through http://www.salesrankexpress.com; accessed 27 November 2018.

[104]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 523–24; see, Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 954.

[105]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 318–19.

[106]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 318.

> evidence of being a new creature in Christ. She is given objective, outside affirmation of her subjective conviction."[107]

Hammett is surely right, for on a credobaptist account of the administration of baptism the congregation affirms that personal faith has grasped "the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3). As he notes, "The blessings promised to faith are subjectively confirmed in baptism."[108] The second benefit derives from the fact that baptism incorporates one into the visible body of Christ (i.e., the local church).[109] "As we enter into union with Christ," Hammett writes, "we also enter into union with his people."[110] Specifically, the benefit that follows is that of the fellowship of the saints and the ministry, accountability, and care—*inter alia*—that comes with it.

Additionally, Hammett locates the "ongoing importance for baptism in the life of a Christian" in the subsequent instances in which one "witness[es] the baptism of others."[111] When baptized persons witness the baptism of someone into the fellowship of their church, "they should be pledging themselves to accept their role in the care of this new brother or sister they are receiving into their family."[112] Framed in this way, baptismal services will take on a corporate and covenantal tone that will enrich the fellowship of the local church. Similarly, Hammett asserts that "observing the baptism of someone else should spark a remembrance of our own baptism and a renewal of the pledges made then."[113] Thus, in a manner similar to a married couple being reminded of their nuptial vows when attending someone else's wedding ceremony, baptismal services occasion a reminder and opportunity to renew one's baptismal pledge.[114]

Hammett, however, in his discussion here does not follow Grenz far enough, as he only connects the ongoing importance of baptism to the baptismal services of others. As noted in our earlier surveys of Grenz and McClendon, the Lord's Supper also functions as an occasion to recall one's baptismal "pledge" or "vow."[115] Grenz writes, "Through our presence at the

[107]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 318.

[108]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 319. With this observation in mind, it is interesting to note that Garrett pairs the doctrines of union with Christ and Assurance, treating them in the same chapter (Ch. 64; Garrett, 2:338–46). This pairing is not only correct but one that would be strengthened by using baptism in his development of union with Christ.

[109]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 319; see also, 119–20.

[110]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 119.

[111]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 319.

[112]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 319. For a helpful examination of the connection between baptism and covenant, see Jason K. Lee, "Baptism and Covenant," in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, eds. Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 119–36.

[113]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 319.

[114]Hammett, *40 Questions*, 319; Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 527.

[115]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 539; McClendon, *Systematic* Theology, 2:410.

Lord's table we publicly confess our loyalty to Christ. Through this act, we are owning once again the pledge or covenant we made at our baptism."[116] Furthermore, Grenz goes on to describe baptism's ongoing impact in terms that extend beyond corporate worship to the mundane moments of life. He writes,

> [Baptism] should be a powerful motivation for godly living throughout life, as we subsequently recall the day of our baptism and thereby are reminded both of the commitment we made to Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit sealed to us on that day. Through his repeated reminders of our baptismal experience, the Spirit also admonishes us concerning the importance of living a holy life, a life conforming to the confession we made that day. And he strengthens us in our Christian walk.[117]

This language is similar to the "improvement" language of the Westminster Larger Catechism.[118] In my examination, Grenz does not seem to develop this broader notion of remembrance beyond this statement. Nonetheless, Luther's description of penance as "nothing but a way and a return to baptism" offers a way to conceptualize what subsequent remembrance might look like.[119] If baptism is a public proclamation of the gospel, a pledge of allegiance to Christ as Lord, a declaration of repentance and faith in Christ, etc. then why should subsequent moments of witness, commitment, belief, and repentance—*inter alia*—not remind one of his or her public initiation into this new life through baptism?

As for integrating baptism into discussions of union with Christ and sanctification, the above survey has also observed minimal usage of baptism in these discussions. I am not proposing that the baptismal tail should wag the dog of systematic theological development. Nonetheless, Paul's use of baptism to teach the realities of union with Christ and sanctification lead me to propose that our discussions of these matters would benefit from following this pattern more closely. Theology needs to maintain a rhythm of summary and explanation.[120] The ordinances, whether we call them "signs" (in McClendon's sense of performance) or "symbols" (in Erickson's sense of embodying what they signify), draw together arguably every strand of Christian theology in summary. The summarizing sign apart from explanations offered

[116]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 539.

[117]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 523–24.

[118]See discussion in earlier section entitled "The Ongoing Use of Baptism Outside the Baptist Tradition."

[119]The pattern Luther proposes seems valid regardless if one joins Luther in his sacramentalism of not. See Luther *Babylonian Captivity*, in *Luther Works: Word and Sacrament II,* vol. 36, eds. Helmut T. Lehmann and Abdel Ross Wentz, trans. A. T.W. Steinhäuser, Frederick C. Ahrens, and Abdel Ross Wentz, 11–126 (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 36:124.

[120]I owe this observation to Steve McKinnion.

within the various systematic loci leaves the sign empty. Extended explanations of the loci without the summarizing sign leave the truth disjointed and uncoordinated.

How might we better incorporate baptism in our systematic theological development? What benefits might this produce? Two examples from Keathley and Garrett serve to illustrate the utility and fruitfulness of better integrating baptism (if not both ordinances) in our systematic development.

First, including connections to baptism in our development of other loci need not be cumbersome or unwieldy. For example, consider the following headings found in Garrett's systematic formulation section on union with Christ and the ways in which each finds clear connection to what credobaptism emblemizes (as identified in the parenthetical notes). In this section Garrett deals with the (a) "Trinitarian Dimension of Union" (an aspect connected to the Trinitarian formula of baptism; Matt 28:19), (b) the "Essential Condition [of Union]: Faith" (a key prerequisite to *believers'* baptism), (c) "The Ethical Consequences" of union (see our earlier discussion of Paul's use of baptism in Rom 6 and Col 2–3), (d) the "Ecclesial Significance" of union (a subject often discussed in the link between baptism and church membership),[121] and (e) the "Abiding or Enduring Quality" of union (a topic exemplified by baptism's one-time administration). Thus, as the above parenthetical notes demonstrate, each of Garrett's aspects of union with Christ finds a strong line of connection to the sign of baptism. These connections support the argument that incorporating baptism in systematic presentations of union with Christ would not be cumbersome or unwieldy. A few, simple, suggestive statements that make the connection plain would in most cases do the necessary integrative work. Further, such a methodological use of baptism would serve to renew the depth of our baptismal theology and practice.

Second, incorporating baptism in our development of other doctrines has the potential to connect those doctrines to our liturgical life of corporate worship. For example, Keathley offers a fruitful methodological schema in his discussion of the "now—not yet" aspect of our salvation, framing salvation with four perspectives: (1) Eternal, (2) Historical, (3) Present, and (4) Ultimate.[122] These perspectives correspond with God's eternal plans, his working out those plans in history through the sending of his Son, his present activity in the lives of those who repent and believe, and the ultimate fulfillment of this salvation plan at Christ's return. This discussion follows immediately upon Keathley's discussion of union with Christ. Importantly, he notes, "All four moments of our salvation should be understood in the light of our union with [Christ] because each aspect is accomplished 'in him.'"[123]

[121]John Hammett writes, "As we enter into union with Christ, we also enter into union with his people," Hammett, *40 Questions*, 119. See also, Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 47.

[122]Keathley, "Salvation," in *Theology for the Church*, 550.

[123]Keathley, "Salvation," in *Theology for the Church*, 550.

This is a helpful description and scheme. I suggest that establishing a clear link between baptism and union with Christ in the previous section would subsequently serve plant this scheme in fertile liturgical soil in which it could continue to grow in the minds of his readers.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that baptism has an ongoing use in the life of a believer. Through a survey of six, influential, popular Baptist Systematic Theologies, I demonstrated that this use has largely been overlooked within this body of texts. We concluded by considering the implications of this ongoing use of baptism for Baptist systematic theological development offering modest proposals for making use of baptism as an integrative, summarizing sign. Though, in Grenz's words, "many Baptists, whose denominational name derives from the ordinance, often view this act [of baptism] as having no real importance beyond forming the entrance into the local church,"[124] my hope is that the preceding study will aid us toward better presenting baptism's ongoing pedagogical function. Improvement in this area will enrich not only our theology of baptism itself but also our synthesis and summary of the Christian faith as liturgically expressed through the ordinances together.

[124]Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 515.