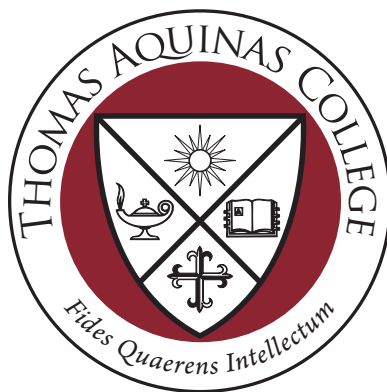


AQUINAS ON BAPTISM

Hosted by Thomas Aquinas College,
in conjunction with the Napa Institute



“All Things Made New.”

Meritage Resort
Napa, California

Thursday, July 22
7:30 – 9:00 a.m.
Carneros Salons B&C

THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, SECOND PART

QUESTION 66. THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

Article 1. Whether Baptism is the mere washing?

Objection 1. It seems that Baptism is not the mere washing. For the washing of the body is something transitory: but Baptism is something permanent. Therefore Baptism is not the mere washing; but rather is it “the regeneration, the seal, the safeguarding, the enlightenment,” as Damascene says (De Fide Orth. iv).

Objection 2. Further, Hugh of St. Victor says (De Sacram. ii) that “Baptism is water sanctified by God’s word for the blotting out of sins.” But the washing itself is not water, but a certain use of water.

Objection 3. Further, Augustine says (Tract. lxxx super Joan.): “The word is added to the element, and this becomes a sacrament.” Now, the element is the water. Therefore Baptism is the water and not the washing.

On the contrary, It is written (Sirach 34:30): “He that washes himself [baptizatur] after touching the dead, if he touch him again, what does his washing avail?” It seems, therefore, that Baptism is the washing or bathing.

I answer that, In the sacrament of Baptism, three things may be considered: namely, that which is “sacrament only”; that which is “reality and sacrament”; and that which is “reality only.” That which is sacrament only, is something visible and outward; the sign, namely, of the inward effect: for such is the very nature of a sacrament. And this outward something that can be perceived by the sense is both the water itself and its use, which is the washing. Hence some have thought that the water itself is the sacrament: which seems to be the meaning of the passage quoted from Hugh of St. Victor. For in the general definition of a sacrament he says that it is “a material element”: and in defining Baptism he says it is “water.”

But this is not true. For since the sacraments of the New Law effect a certain sanctification, there the sacrament is completed where the sanctification is completed. Now, the sanctification is not completed in water; but a certain sanctifying instrumental virtue, not permanent but transient, passes from the water, in which it is, into man who is the subject of true sanctification. Consequently the sacrament is not completed in the very water, but in applying the water to man, i.e. in the washing. Hence the Master (iv, 3) says that “Baptism is the outward washing of the body done together with the prescribed form of words.”

The Baptismal character is both reality and sacrament: because it is something real signified by the outward washing; and a sacramental sign of the inward justification: and this last is the reality only, in this sacrament—namely, the reality signified and not signifying.

Reply to Objection 1. That which is both sacrament and reality—i.e. the character—and that which is reality only—i.e. the inward justification—remain: the character remains and is indelible, as stated above (III:63:5); the justification remains, but can be lost. Consequently Damascene defined Baptism, not as to that which is done outwardly, and is the sacrament only; but as to that which is inward. Hence he sets down two things as pertaining to the character—namely, “seal” and “safeguarding”; inasmuch as the character which is called a seal, so far as itself is concerned, safeguards the soul in good. He also sets down two things as pertaining to the ultimate reality of the sacrament—namely, “regeneration” which refers to the fact that man by being baptized begins the new life of righteousness; and “enlightenment,” which refers especially to faith, by which man receives spiritual life, accord-

ing to Habakkuk 2 (Hebrews 10:38; cf. Habakkuk 2:4): “But (My) just man lives by faith”; and Baptism is a sort of protestation of faith; whence it is called the “Sacrament of Faith.” Likewise Dionysius defined Baptism by its relation to the other sacraments, saying (Eccl. Hier. ii) that it is “the principle that forms the habits of the soul for the reception of those most holy words and sacraments”; and again by its relation to heavenly glory, which is the universal end of all the sacraments, when he adds, “preparing the way for us, whereby we mount to the repose of the heavenly kingdom”; and again as to the beginning of spiritual life, when he adds, “the conferring of our most sacred and Godlike regeneration.”

Reply to Objection 2. As already stated, the opinion of Hugh of St. Victor on this question is not to be followed. Nevertheless the saying that “Baptism is water” may be verified in so far as water is the material principle of Baptism: and thus there would be “causal predication.”

Reply to Objection 3. When the words are added, the element becomes a sacrament, not in the element itself, but in man, to whom the element is applied, by being used in washing him. Indeed, this is signified by those very words which are added to the element, when we say: “I baptize thee,” etc.

Article 2. Whether Baptism was instituted after Christ’s Passion?

Objection 1. It seems that Baptism was instituted after Christ’s Passion. For the cause precedes the effect. Now Christ’s Passion operates in the sacraments of the New Law. Therefore Christ’s Passion precedes the institution of the sacraments of the New Law: especially the sacrament of Baptism since the Apostle says (Romans 6:3): “All we, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in His death,” etc.

Objection 2. Further, the sacraments of the New Law derive their efficacy from the mandate of Christ. But Christ gave the disciples the mandate of Baptism after His Passion and Resurrection, when He said: “Going, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father,” etc. (Matthew 28:19). Therefore it seems that Baptism was instituted after Christ’s Passion.

Objection 3. Further, Baptism is a necessary sacrament, as stated above ([65], 4): wherefore, seemingly, it must have been binding on man as soon as it was instituted. But before Christ’s Passion men were not bound to be baptized: for Circumcision was still in force, which was supplanted by Baptism. Therefore it seems that Baptism was not instituted before Christ’s Passion.

On the contrary, Augustine says in a sermon on the Epiphany (Append. Sermon., clxxxv): “As soon as Christ was plunged into the waters, the waters washed away the sins of all.” But this was before Christ’s Passion. Therefore Baptism was instituted before Christ’s Passion.

I answer that, As stated above (III:62:1), sacraments derive from their institution the power of conferring grace. Wherefore it seems that a sacrament is then instituted, when it receives the power of producing its effect. Now Baptism received this power when Christ was baptized. Consequently Baptism was truly instituted then, if we consider it as a sacrament. But the obligation of receiving this sacrament was proclaimed to mankind after the Passion and Resurrection. First, because Christ’s Passion put an end to the figurative sacraments, which were supplanted by Baptism and the other sacraments of the New Law. Secondly, because by Baptism man is “made conformable” to Christ’s Passion and Resurrection, in so far as he dies to sin and begins to live anew unto righteousness. Consequently it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise again, before proclaiming to man his obligation of conforming himself to Christ’s Death and Resurrection.

Reply to Objection 1. Even before Christ's Passion, Baptism, inasmuch as it foreshadowed it, derived its efficacy therefrom; but not in the same way as the sacraments of the Old Law. For these were mere figures: whereas Baptism derived the power of justifying from Christ Himself, to Whose power the Passion itself owed its saving virtue.

Reply to Objection 2. It was not meet that men should be restricted to a number of figures by Christ, Who came to fulfil and replace the figure by His reality. Therefore before His Passion He did not make Baptism obligatory as soon as it was instituted; but wished men to become accustomed to its use; especially in regard to the Jews, to whom all things were figurative, as Augustine says (*Contra Faust.* iv). But after His Passion and Resurrection He made Baptism obligatory, not only on the Jews, but also on the Gentiles, when He gave the commandment: "Going, teach ye all nations."

Reply to Objection 3. Sacraments are not obligatory except when we are commanded to receive them. And this was not before the Passion, as stated above. For our Lord's words to Nicodemus (*John* 3:5), "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God, seem to refer to the future rather than to the present."

Article 11. Whether three kinds of Baptism are fittingly described— viz. Baptism of Water, of Blood, and of the Spirit?

Objection 1. It seems that the three kinds of Baptism are not fittingly described as Baptism of Water, of Blood, and of the Spirit, i.e. of the Holy Ghost. Because the Apostle says (*Ephesians* 4:5): "One Faith, one Baptism." Now there is but one Faith. Therefore there should not be three Baptisms.

Objection 2. Further, Baptism is a sacrament, as we have made clear above (*III:65:1*). Now none but Baptism of Water is a sacrament. Therefore we should not reckon two other Baptisms.

Objection 3. Further, Damascene (*De Fide Orth.* iv) distinguishes several other kinds of Baptism. Therefore we should admit more than three Baptisms.

On the contrary, on *Hebrews* 6:2, "Of the doctrine of Baptisms," the gloss says: "He uses the plural, because there is Baptism of Water, of Repentance, and of Blood."

I answer that, As stated above (*III:62:5*), Baptism of Water has its efficacy from Christ's Passion, to which a man is conformed by Baptism, and also from the Holy Ghost, as first cause. Now although the effect depends on the first cause, the cause far surpasses the effect, nor does it depend on it. Consequently, a man may, without Baptism of Water, receive the sacramental effect from Christ's Passion, in so far as he is conformed to Christ by suffering for Him. Hence it is written (*Apocalypse* 7:14): "These are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb." In like manner a man receives the effect of Baptism by the power of the Holy Ghost, not only without Baptism of Water, but also without Baptism of Blood: forasmuch as his heart is moved by the Holy Ghost to believe in and love God and to repent of his sins: wherefore this is also called Baptism of Repentance. Of this it is written (*Isaiah* 4:4): "If the Lord shall wash away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall wash away the blood of Jerusalem out of the midst thereof, by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning." Thus, therefore, each of these other Baptisms is called Baptism, forasmuch as it takes the place of Baptism. Wherefore Augustine says (*De Unico Baptismo Parvulorum* iv): "The Blessed Cyprian argues with considerable reason from the thief to whom, though not baptized, it was said: 'Today shalt thou be

with Me in Paradise' that suffering can take the place of Baptism. Having weighed this in my mind again and again, I perceive that not only can suffering for the name of Christ supply for what was lacking in Baptism, but even faith and conversion of heart, if perchance on account of the stress of the times the celebration of the mystery of Baptism is not practicable."

Reply to Objection 1. The other two Baptisms are included in the Baptism of Water, which derives its efficacy, both from Christ's Passion and from the Holy Ghost. Consequently for this reason the unity of Baptism is not destroyed.

Reply to Objection 2. As stated above (III:60:1), a sacrament is a kind of sign. The other two, however, are like the Baptism of Water, not, indeed, in the nature of sign, but in the baptismal effect. Consequently they are not sacraments.

Reply to Objection 3. Damascene enumerates certain figurative Baptisms. For instance, "the Deluge" was a figure of our Baptism, in respect of the salvation of the faithful in the Church; since then "a few . . . souls were saved in the ark [Vulgate: 'by water,'" according to 1 Peter 3:20. He also mentions "the crossing of the Red Sea": which was a figure of our Baptism, in respect of our delivery from the bondage of sin; hence the Apostle says (1 Corinthians 10:2) that "all . . . were baptized in the cloud and in the sea." And again he mentions "the various washings which were customary under the Old Law," which were figures of our Baptism, as to the cleansing from sins: also "the Baptism of John," which prepared the way for our Baptism.



California

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