

History of Sprinkling

Does church history record the first account of any attempt to baptize by any other mode than by immersion?

Yes! In about 250 A.D. there lived a man named Novation, who was on his death bed. He had never been immersed. His friends laid around him many bed sheets and poured water all over him, trying to immerse him in his bed. This was accepted by the populace as his baptism. He later recovered, but was never immersed. He then became a leader of a group called "Novationists", which other Christians considered a heretical sect. This is the first account of anyone substituting for immersion. This is confirmed by numerous encyclopedias and ancient authors. Eusebius (263-340 A.D.), for example, was a church historian. He says in his Church History:

"Novation, aided by the exorcists, when attacked with an obstinate disease, and being supposed at the point of death, was baptized by aspersion (pouring) in the bed on which he lay; if indeed it be proper to say that one like him did receive baptism".

When did the Roman Catholic Church accept sprinkling?

"The first law for sprinkling was obtained in the following manner: **Pope Stephen II** being driven from Rome, by Adolphus, King of Lombards, in 753, fled to Pepin, who, a short time before, had usurped the crown of France. While he remained there the Monks of Cressy, in Britany, consulted him whether in case of necessity, baptism poured on the head of the infant would be lawful. Stephen replied that it would, **yet pouring and sprinkling were not allowed except in cases of necessity. It was not till the year 1311 that the legislature, in a council held at Ravenna, declared immersion or sprinkling to be indifferent.** In Scotland, however, sprinkling was never practiced, in ordinary cases, till after the Reformation-about the middle of the 16th century. From Scotland it made its way into England, in the reign of Elizabeth, but was not authorized in the Established Church" (**Edinburg Encyclopedia**).

How did sprinkling spread among Protestants?

In 1556, a book was published at that place, containing, "The form of prayer and ministration of the sacraments, approved by the famous and godly learned man, John Calvin," in which the administrator is enjoined to take water in his hand, and lay it upon the child's forehead. These Scottish exiles, who had renounced the authority of the Pope, implicitly acknowledged the authority of Calvin; and returning to their own country, with Knox at their head, in 1559, established sprinkling in Scotland. From Scotland, this practice made its way into England in the reign of Elizabeth; but was not authorized by the established church. **In the Assembly of Divines, held at Westminster, in 1643, it was keenly debated, whether immersion or sprinkling should be adopted; 25 voted for sprinkling, and 24 for immersion;** and even this small majority was obtained at the

earnest request of Dr. Lightfoot, who had acquired great influence in that assembly. Sprinkling is therefore the general practice of this country. Many Christians, however, especially the Baptists reject it. The Greek Church universally adheres to immersion.- **Art. Bapt.**, Vol. III, pp. 245, 246. (Edinburgh Cyclopaedia).

What caused the practice of sprinkling to gain favor among the churches?

King Edward VI. and Queen Elizabeth were immersed. The first Prayer Book of Edward VI. (1549), following the Office of Sarum, directs the priest to dip the child in water thrice, "first dipping the right side; secondly, the left side; the third time, dipping the face towards the forte."

In the second Prayer Book (1552), the priest is simply directed to dip the child discreetly and warily, and permission is given, for the first time in Great Britain, to substitute pouring if the godfathers and godmothers certify that the child is weak. During the reign of Elizabeth, says Dr. Wall, "**many fond ladies and gentlewomen first, and then by degrees, the common people would obtain the favor of the priest to have their children pass for weak children too tender to endure dipping in the water.**" The same writer traces the practice of sprinkling to the period of the Long Parliament and the Westminster Assembly.

This change in England and other Protestant churches from immersion to pouring and from pouring to sprinkling was encouraged by the authority of Calvin, who declared the mode to be a matter of no importance, and by the Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643-1652), which decided that pouring or sprinkling is "not only lawful but also sufficient." The Westminster Confession declares: "Dipping of the person into water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person."

But the Episcopal ritual retains the direction of immersion, although it admits sprinkling or pouring as equally valid. In the revision of the Prayer Book under Charles II. (1662) the mode is left to the judgment of the parents or godfathers and the priest is ordered: "If the godfathers and godmothers shall certify him that the child may well endure it, to dip it in the water discreetly and warily; but if they certify that the child is weak, it shall suffice to pour water upon it." The difference is only this: by the old rubric the minister was to dip unless there was good cause for exception in case of weakness; by the new rubric he was to dip if it was certified that the child could endure it. The theory of the Anglican Church favors dipping, but the ruling practice is pouring. On the Continent the change had taken place earlier.-**Teaching of the Twelve Apostles**, pp. 51, 52, 53.

If "baptizo" means "immerse", how did they get the populace to go along with it?

John Calvin convinced John Knox that the mode was of no significance. Knox convinced the Bishops of England that it was immaterial whether one immersed or sprinkled the candidate. So when the **Bishop's Bible** was translated in 1561, they did not translate "baptizo" as "immerse". Instead, they translated or transferred the letters of "baptizo",

into English. In other words, they coined a new word. They dropped the final "o" and put on an "e", and the word "baptize" came into being. This allowed them to "sprinkle" and yet not mistranslate the word. They knew that they dare not translate it "sprinkle", for that work in Greek is "rantizo". Nor could they translate it "pour", for that is the word "ekeheo" in Greek. In coining a new English word, they could tell the populace that when one is baptized, it may mean any mode of their choosing.

How about the King James Bible and "baptizo"?

King James authorized the King James Version, and it was published in 1611. It was for the common English speaking person. He insisted that the old ecclesiastical words used in the Bishop's Bible be retained so as to agree with the practices of the established church. Therefore, the **King James Version** retained the new coined word "baptize", instead of translating it. Thus, the populace is still ignorant of what Jesus really said to do. It is our opinion that it is as wrong to perpetuate this error, as those who originated it.

Were the King James Version translators consistent in translating "baptizo" as "baptized"?

Most definitely not! They used "baptize" when the ordinance of Christian baptism was referred to, but otherwise, it is translated "dipped". For example **Matthew 26:23**- "And He answered and said, 'He that **dippeth** his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.'

Luke 16:24- "And he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may **dip** the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'

This should alarm anyone who is serious about wanting to do what God commanded, rather than follow the doctrines of men.

Did the Bible which Jesus used translate the word "dipped" with the word "baptizo"?

Yes. The Greek Old Testament was translated in 285 B.C. It uses "baptizo" to translate the word "dip". Each time the translator who translated "baptizo" into English in the Old Testament they put "dip". For example:

Genesis 37:31- "And they took Joseph's coat and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood."

II Kings 5: 14 - "Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

Do sprinkling and dipping (baptizo) appear in the Bible in the same verse?

Yes.

Leviticus 4:6 "And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the Lord, before the veil of the sanctuary." Leviticus 14:6-7-"As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water: and he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field." Obviously, "baptizo" means "to dip", and differs from "rantizo" (sprinkling).

Does "pour" and "dip" "baptizo" appear together in the same verse?

Yes!

Leviticus 9:9 - "And the sons of Aaron brought the blood unto him: and he dipped his finger in the blood, and put it upon the horns of the altar, and poured out the blood at the bottom of the altar."

When did infant baptism originate?

Tertullian (200 A.D.) is the first to make an illusion to infant baptism. He opposed it. It was then strongly advocated by Cyprian. He had a great misunderstanding of baptism, for he substituted it for circumcision. Origen defended it and said it was needed to remove the pollution acquired at birth by original sin and that it would **remove the sins of any previous life** the child may have lived. We reject both the doctrine of original sin and reincarnation.

Did all early Christians believe in original sin?

No.

Apology of Aristiaes: "And when a child is born to any one of them, they praise God; and if again, it chance to die in its infancy, they praise God mightily, as for one who has passed through the world without sins" (**Syriac Version**, c. 15, ed. J. Rendel Harris, Camb. TS).

John Chrysostom, "You see how many are the benefits of Baptism. And yet some think that the Heavenly grace consists only in forgiveness of sins: but I have reckoned up ten advantages of it. For this cause we baptize infants also, though they are not defiled with sin: that there may be superadded to them Holiness, Righteousness, Adoption, Inheritance, a Brotherhood with Christ, and to be made Members of him" (see Aug. c. **Julian**. I. vi. f.).

What does Church History say of infant baptism?

Martin Luther (Lutheran), in "Vanity of Infant Baptism", part 2, page 3: "It cannot be proved by the Sacred Scriptures that infant baptism was instituted by Christ, or begun by the first Christians after the apostles".

Neander (Lutheran Historian), in "History of the Christian Church and Religion", Vol. 1, p. 311: "Baptism was administered at first only to adults, as men were accustomed to conceive baptism and faith as strictly connected".

Bishop Burnett (Episcopalian), in "Exposition of the 39 Articles", Article 27: "There is no express precept, or rule, given in the N. T. for the baptism of infants".

Dr. Wall (Episcopalian), in "History of Infant Baptism", introduction, p. 1: "Among all the persons that are recorded as baptized by the Apostles, there is no express mention of any infant".

Does the Bible hint at infant baptism?

In order for infant baptism to be in the New Testament, we would need a command, an example, or a necessary inference. None of these exist. If Jesus commanded it, we have three alternatives which we can accept.

1. Jesus commanded it, but the apostles did not understand it. This impeaches the apostles' inspiration.
2. Jesus commanded it, and the apostles understood it, but did not practice it. This impeaches the apostles' integrity.
3. Jesus commanded it, and the apostles practiced it, but did not record it. This impeaches the inspired Biblical History.

In light of this, it can hardly be said that those who immerse deny basic Bible doctrine, if we do not practice infant baptism. Those who so baptize babies are free to do so, but should admit it to be their church doctrine, not Bible doctrine. They need to realize, however, the danger of this practice. The command is not "He that is baptized and is saved, shall believe." It is "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." When one is sprinkled as an infant, when he becomes an adult, he sees no need to do what Jesus really said to do. "He that believeth and is baptized (immersed), shall be saved." May God bless these thoughts to a better knowledge of His will.