



Baptism and the pollution of Africa's water

Author:Ben J. de Klerk¹**Affiliation:**¹School of Ecclesiastical Studies, North-West University, South Africa**Note:**

This article was initially a paper delivered at the Annual conference of the Society for Practical Theology on 23 January 2014 at the University of Pretoria. The article addresses the theme of the conference: Practical theology and human waste in Africa.

This article is published in the section Practical Theology of the Society for Practical Theology in South Africa.

Correspondence to:

Ben de Klerk

Email:

ben.deklerk@nwu.ac.za

Postal address:

PO Box 20764, Noordbrug 2522, South Africa

Dates:

Received: 28 Jan. 2014

Accepted: 18 June 2014

Published: 20 Nov. 2014

How to cite this article:

De Klerk, B.J., 2014, 'Baptism and the pollution of Africa's water', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70(2), Art. #2620, 8 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i2.2620>

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Water often moves us to wonder, joy, terror or peace, and many times, water moves us to prayer. On the other hand, it is projected that, because of water shortages, by 2020, several African countries will experience a 50% reduction in crop yields. Between 75 and 250 million Africans will confront freshwater shortages. Water plays an important role in baptism: the requirements of Christian baptism are the use of water and calling upon the name of the Triune God. Baptism as a water bath is the fulfilment of the Old Testament washings. Nobody could and still can appear before God as an unclean person; baptism stresses the importance of cleansing. The research question that is discussed in this article is the following: in what way may baptism, as holy sign and seal of the washing away of sins by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ, contribute to sensitise believers to combat waste in our rivers and dams and the pollution of our waters? Two aspects of baptism are discussed, namely cleansing and going under and coming up from the water as sign and seal of partaking in Christ's death and resurrection.

Introduction

Liturgy, therefore also the sacrament of baptism, places the risen Lord, the Lord of the creation and the Lord of the church (Col 1:15) in the midst of the community of believers. Truly, ecology and liturgy are connected in Christ, the head of the creation and of the church. Okonkwo (2011) visualises the connection in the following way:

[W]e imagine a situation whereby liturgical concern for ecological crises can develop into a study to be known as 'liturg ecology'. At such a time, liturgy and liturgical celebrations will become means through which human beings can better come to terms with the way they inflict harm on the environment. It is unlikely that this will be difficult as the connection between sacraments (e.g. liturgy) and ecology is not far-fetched. (p. 42)

This article is an attempt to make a contribution to the development of a liturg ecology by investigating the possible influence that the baptised may have on water pollution. The research question is the following: In what way could an intensified experience of baptism contribute to making baptised people more sensitive to the necessity of combating waste in our rivers and dams, as well as pollution of water in general? The method followed is a literature study supplemented by relevant applications. Attention will be given to the importance of water and its pollution, the meaning of water in baptism and a few guidelines for making the baptised sensitive to the pollution of water.

The gift of water

Water is life. These words convey the importance of water on Earth. Earth is the only planet in our solar system on which water occurs in liquid form ... and, therefore, probably the only planet where life can develop and flourish. The hydrological cycle of water (continuous circulation of water from the sea to the atmosphere, to the land and back to the sea) necessitates precipitation in the form of rain to refresh and replenish the earth making it productive and balancing the ecosystem. This makes water a renewable, but simultaneously irreplaceable, resource. Human-environment interactions result in significant changes in the natural water balance. (Resane 2010:2)

We live on the water planet. More or less 70% of the surface of the earth is covered by water. Moreover, several people obtain their water from beneath the surface of the earth. Water is everywhere in the air. We feel it in humidity and see it in the clouds. More than 70% of our bodies also consist of water. Therefore, water is around us, above us and in us. Water is literally everywhere:

Water is everywhere in the Bible, too. Perhaps at first it may not seem so, but a more attentive look perceives the presence of water in many places, like a long thin river threading its way from Genesis to Revelation. (Bouma-Prediger 2012:42)

In fact, according to Genesis 1, water had been there even before God gave his creative commands. Christ calls himself the One that gives the water of life (Jn 7:37, 7:38). Water that gives life, the



water of life, flows from the throne of God as an image of his glory at the second coming (cf. Rv 22:1, 22:2; Ezk 47). God's blessing has always permeated water, from the remoteness of the cosmos to the cells of our bodies. In all, this reflection provides expanded insights regarding gifts of God present from the beginning of creation, and brings to mind the great stream of blessings that is realised anew in each baptismal celebration.

Stewart (2011) indicates that water is frequently found in the prayers of believers saying:

Water often moves us to wonder, joy, terror or peace, and many times, water – whether it's the awesome power of ocean waves, the cold upwelling waters of a spring, a small, still pond, the sound of a mountain stream flowing over rocks, deep, slow rivers with creatures rippling the surface, crashing waterfalls, nourishing rain on parched land, the seemingly infinite expanse of the sea or hot springs rising mysteriously from the earth – moves us to prayer. (p. 22)

Psalm 104 is such a prayer of praise to God, who provides water from the clouds, the fountains and the mountain streams. The Psalm calls upon the hearers to pay attention to the ecological miracle of water. Stewart (2011:22) rightly asks, 'How might a vision as grand as Psalm 104 be glimpsed at our local baptisms and in our worship spaces?' Water means life, because every living creature is dependent on water. Where there is water, there is biological diversity, which is especially visible in the role that water play in the change of seasons from winter to spring, from spring to summer, from summer to autumn and from autumn to winter.

Water also has contrasting meanings. It stands for creation and beginning, but also destruction and end. Water stands for refreshment, purity and fertility, but also for horror such as floods, tsunamis and drought (Beck 2001:291). God also meted out his punishment and vengeance through water, as described in the following passage:

God strikes man by striking the earth with the waters of death. To destroy mankind God must wipe clean the earth itself. Mankind and the soil are one flesh. It is the earth which must accept the judgment of God for man's sin. The two partners go down together, drowning in the waters of the Lord's wrath. (Alms 2011:181)

The Flood not only symbolises rot and death, but also purification and life from death. When the old human being was destroyed by the Flood, the new human being could rise from the water and a new era started.

In Christian faith, all aspects of the rich symbolism of water are captured by baptism with its forms and rituals. Baptism has become a fundamental sacrament indicating and confirming the road to salvation. However, it is not the water, but the connection with Christ's deed of salvation that gives baptism its unique character.

The pollution of water

In 1994, the African National Congress and its Alliance partners came up with a policy framework known as The

Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Chapter 2 of the document addresses the importance of meeting the basic needs. It claims that water, as 'a natural resource should be made available in a sustainable manner to all South Africans' (Resane 2010:1). The document continues to emphasise the following fact:

[T]he fundamental principle of our water resources policy is the right to access clean water – 'water security for all'. The RDP recognizes the economic value of water and the environment, and advocates an economically, environmentally and politically sustainable approach to the management of our water resources and the collection, treatment and disposal of water. (Resane 2010:3)

The question is whether this policy has been implemented in practice and whether South Africans have accepted it as part of their view of life. In an investigation by Anderson *et al.* (2007), conclusions were, amongst others, the following:

The difference between rural and urban households in 2004 with reference to water quality and type of sanitation is clear. Only 15% of all rural households had access to both clean water and a flush or chemical toilet compared to slightly less than 32% of rural households which lacked both clean water and a flush or chemical toilet. A completely different picture is found for urban households. Eighty-five percent of urban households had both clean water and a flush or chemical toilet, while less than .5% lacked clean water and did not have a flush or chemical toilet. (p. 144)

They further found that just more than 10% of all households identified water pollution as a community problem, despite the attention given to environmental aspects in the Constitution (Anderson *et al.* 2007:160). The inadequate awareness amongst the South African population does not differ from the awareness of other populations in the world.

The quality of water provision in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries is a great concern, because water pollution bears on the quality of water and has an unavoidable impact on the health of humankind. One example mentioned in the Natural Resources Defence Council's (NRDC) Annual Report of 2011 is that of Harare in Zimbabwe:

In Zimbabwe, the discharge of industrial and municipal effluent has heavily polluted Lake Chivero, Harare's principal water supply dam leading to massive fish deaths in the lake. Because of poor original planning, Harare lies within its own catchment area. This means that all the city's waste, which passes through the heavily industrialised and densely populated areas flows into the lake. This has compromised the quality of the city's water and contributed to the accumulation of ammonia compounds that are causing fish deaths on the lake every year. Lack of resources to upgrade sewage treatment works, lack of funding to improve water quality management and research, overcrowding, bureaucracy and poor management of wetlands has led to the eutrophication of the lake. The Firlle sewage works in Harare was designed to treat 72 000 cubic metres of wastewater per day, but the plant now receives more than 100 000 cubic metres of wastewater a day. The sewage effluent which is partially treated and nutrient-rich finds its way to Lake Chivero contributing to its eutrophication. (p. 14)



The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects that by 2020 several African countries will experience a 50% reduction in crop yields; between 75 and 250 million Africans will confront freshwater shortages (IPCC 2007:50).

What are the reasons for water pollution? With billions of people on the planet (and the number is increasing), disposing of sewage and wastewater is a major problem. The treatment capabilities for sewage and wastewater is still lacking in many parts of the world, especially in the poorer and undeveloped countries. As a result, large amounts of sewage-polluted untreated water are discharged into water bodies every day, contaminating water that is used for drinking and other uses. As such, sewage and wastewater is still one of the major causes of water pollution in the world today (NRDC 2011:12). Mining is another of the major causes of water pollution. Mining activities consume large amounts of water in processing the ores from the mines. In addition, mining also results in large amounts of chemicals, heavy metals soil and other waste rock materials contaminating and polluting the water bodies (World Health Organization [WHO] 2008:3; cf. All-recycling-facts.com, n.d.).

The dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness – both individually and collectively – are contrary to the order of creation, an order that is characterised by mutual interdependence:

When nature is exploited, so are human beings and communities, with the most severe results for those whose inheritance and culture are inextricably allied with their relations to their immediate environment. ... The earth itself is exploited to excess so that the environment suffers in many respects, not only because too much of its wealth is extracted but also because agricultural land, waters and forests are destroyed or polluted and ecological equilibrium is not maintained. (Power 2010:294)

The poor and vulnerable in the community experience the worst effects. As many of the people in the more arid areas of Africa live next to rivers, the pollution of their drinking water, washing water and their fields (food) truly has an adverse effect on their lives:

Children, the elderly, the poor and impoverished, the malnourished, those without family support, and those who already have weakened immune systems due to illness: these are the especially vulnerable members of every community who are most susceptible to suffering as a result of the pollution of water. (Galbraith 2009:288)

This situation results in diseases of which diarrhoea is most common. Diarrhoea is a very common outcome when people consume water contaminated by pathogens. Based on a 2008 report by the WHO titled *Safer water, better health* (2008), about 1.5 million people in the world die from diarrhoea each year, with the majority being children:

Besides diarrhoea, the health effects of water pollution by sewage contamination, depending on the type of pathogen ingested, also include conditions like dysentery (frequent passage of faeces containing blood and mucus, with vomiting of blood in some cases), Salmonellosis (fever, diarrhoea, vomiting), typhoid fever (sustained high fever, diarrhoea, delirium in serious states, and eventual death if left untreated).

De Gruchy (2009:58) states ‘we all live downstream’ and that we are therefore exposed to pollution. As a result, we have to ask with a self-investigating attitude whether human greed and an uncontrollable consumer mentality do not contribute to the pollution of water, thus aggravating the maltreatment of the poor and the vulnerable in society (De Gruchy 2009:58). In the light of this question, the focus ought to be on the meaning of baptism with water as one of the possible solutions to combating the pollution of water.

The meaning of baptism with water: An overview of its history

In the Old Testament the high priest could enter the most holy place only once a year, namely on the Day of Atonement. The high priest had to bring a sin offering and a burnt offering (Lv 16:3): ‘In a type of Old Testament Baptism, he would then bathe his body in water and put on holy garments’ (cf. Lv 16:4; Scaer 2008:237). There were also ceremonial washings at the Qumran community. However, they were alive to the fact that ceremonial washings were not sufficient, for to them true cleansing was only accomplished by fulfilment of the commandments (Floor 1983:3 refers to 1 Qumran S3:4–9). The proselyte baptism, which was performed by the baptised himself, wanted to express that cleansing was absolutely necessary before someone could be accepted into the new community of the people of Israel (Spinks 2006:4).

John proclaims a baptism of water for repentance – a baptism marked by a decision to turn away from sin and towards God, in preparation for the one ushering in the kingdom of God (Connors 2010:402). The ritual use of water in ablutions is a widespread religious phenomenon, and it was certainly practised within 1st century Judaism and Christianity. That John performed a water rite identified as a ‘baptism’ is one of the surest pieces of historical information we possess concerning John: ‘He not only called people to repentance and baptism, he also had to explain the significance of his baptism’ (Webb 2000:279).

Though other forms of ablution were practised in Second-Temple Judaism (e.g. hand washing, foot washing and sprinkling), John’s baptism involved bathing, that is, an immersion. Most descriptions of John’s baptism associate it with the Jordan River (e.g. Mk 1:5, 1:9–1:10). The use of flowing water (or ‘living’ water) was required in the Hebrew Bible for the most severe forms of uncleanness, and in Second-Temple Judaism, flowing water or rivers was associated with repentance and forgiveness:

John’s use of the Jordan River probably does have symbolic significance. John preached imminent judgment coming upon all and called people to repentance and baptism. Neither was optional – repentance and its expression in baptism went hand in hand. It was a ‘repentance-baptism’. (Webb 2000:280)

John announced to everyone the necessity of his repentance-baptism to be prepared for the imminent, eschatological judgement and restoration to be carried out by the expected figure. John’s baptising ministry, therefore, created a



fundamental distinction between the repentant and the unrepentant, the prepared and the unprepared, those who would receive the expected figure's restoration and those who would be judged (Beck 2001:295). The baptism of John must be seen in the light of God's vital, eschatological intervention in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. The call for baptism is an indication that the kingdom of God is near (Floor 1983:7):

According to the Synoptic Gospels, John summoned the people of Israel to undergo a ritual washing in the Jordan for the remission of sins in preparation for the one who was to come with apocalyptic judgement; once more the Jordan was serving as a boundary to a promised land. (Spinks 2006:xi)

Jesus also goes to John the Baptist to be baptised by him in the Jordan. He was immersed and when coming up out of the water he experienced three things:

The heavens were opened above him, the Spirit descended on him, and the heavenly voice spoke to him. These three events – rending of heaven, descent of the Spirit, voice of God – indicate the inauguration of God's eschatological kingdom. Their concurrence at the baptism indicates that Jesus is the inaugurator of that kingdom. (Edwards 1991:43)

Mark 1:10 tells us that at Jesus' Baptism the heavens were not simply opened (as in Matthew and Luke), but they were 'torn open' (Scaer 2008:237). At Jesus' death in Mark 15:38, the temple curtain was torn open. Already at his baptism, therefore, there was a prediction of how the Son of God, who had come to dwell amongst people, would take eternal death on him and give life, and eternal access, to everyone who believe in him (Lathrop 2009:34).

After Christ had instituted Christian baptism in Matthew 28:19, especially two requirements for baptism were clear, namely using water and calling upon the Triune God (Immink 2011:162). At the end of the 1st century, baptism is described as follows in the *Didache* 7.1:

Regarding baptism: You must baptise as follows: with running water In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. If you do not have any running water, use warm water. If none of these is available, pour water three times on the head in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Barnard 1998:283)

In circa 200 AD, Tertullian described baptism as *washing off or purifying*. He said the flesh was washed so that the soul may be purified from blemishes (Barnard 1998:283).

During the same period, the practice of the bishop consecrating the water by a prayer came into existence, as the water would be used in the service of God (Trimp 1983:158). In the baptisterium adjacent to the church building, the person to be baptised was requested to wash his or her body beforehand, but to put on dirty clothes. Leaving the dirty clothes behind in a room, the person was then immersed in the baptismal water. On coming out on the other side, white clothes were given to him or her. The newly baptised person was led into the church to join the congregational gathering and to celebrate the Holy Communion together with them (cf. Barnard 1998:284–287). The dirty clothes and the new

clothes symbolised putting off the old human being and rising to a new life together with Christ. It is possible that the baptismal water was consecrated by means of an exorcism in later years. In the late Middle Ages, the baptismal emphasis on the doctrine of death, burial and resurrection in Christ was not so strong anymore, but it fell rather on the washing off the original sin. Therefore, baptism had to take place as quickly as possible after birth so that the child would not die unbaptised or unsaved (Barnard 1998:288).

Calvin rejected the baptisterium idea and placed baptism in the midst of the congregation. He also banned exorcism of the water. What does the rite of baptism *signify* to Calvin? According to Calvin (1975:IV.15.1), it 'represents the cleansing of sins and the assurance of one's salvation. It is the public declaration of personal faith in Christ and the symbol of entry into the visible church'. Calvin explains 1 Peter 3:21, saying that it does not mean the water has the power to save us or to bring about our rebirth and to renew us. The sacrament in itself is not the reason for salvation, but it provides us with knowledge and certainty of salvation (Calvin 1975:IV.15.2). The water does not bring about washing off of sins, for that is only possible through the blood of Christ, which was shed to wash away our blemishes and render us clean us before God. The sacrifice of Christ is fulfilled in us when our conscience is sprinkled by the Holy Spirit. The sacrament assures us of this truth (Calvin 1975:IV.15.14). Baptism is a sign and seal of incorporating the congregation into the death in Christ and the new life in him (cf. Calvin 1975:IV.15.1–6). Calvin therefore mentions both the aspects of cleansing and of death and new life. The Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 26 and 27) emphasises water as a sign of cleansing; similarly, the Belgic Confession, *Article 34*, places strong emphasis on cleansing. However, the latter also mentions the Red Sea, through which believers must pass to escape the tyranny of the Pharaoh and to enter into the spiritual Canaan, which is a reference to the death and new life together with Christ.

In this short overview of the history of baptism, it is clear that cleansing has been linked with water at all times. However, the combined action of going under in and rising up from the water as sign and seal of partaking in the death and resurrection of Christ is only found in the second century and during the Reformation of the 16th century. These two aspects will be investigated in the next section; there are also other important meanings of baptism that is not discussed here because of the limited scope of this article.

Baptism as water that washes (purifies), and as going under into and rising up from the water

The word in the New Testament for baptism is *baptizein*, which has developed from *baptein*. *Baptizein* is first all, as *baptein*, translated by 'immersion' or 'submersion'. It also has the more specific meaning of 'bringing to the edge of a precipice', or even stronger, 'allowing to perish', 'ruin someone' (Versteeg 1983:9). The latter is especially the



meaning of *baptizein* in the Septuagint. In addition, it has the religious meaning of ‘washing to become ritually purified’ (cf. 2 Ki 5:14). Louw and Nida (1996:53.41) give the following description of *baptizein*: ‘To employ water in a religious ceremony designed to symbolize purification and initiation on the basis of repentance’. In the New Testament, *baptizein* has a predominantly religious meaning as it refers to the relationship with God (Waddell 2009:88).

Water as symbol of cleansing in baptism

Baptism as a water bath is amongst others also the fulfilment of the Old Testament washings. Nobody may appear before God as an unclean person. Baptism underlines the necessity of cleansing and refers to the gift of cleansing (Versteeg 1983:17). Cleansing in the Old Testament was in the first place a meeting with God. On arriving at Mount Sinai, the people of Israel were commanded to wash their clothes. In the Old Testament, the washings were religious events through and through. They referred to the great work of cleansing, which would be performed by the Messiah in providing purification for sins (Heb 1:3). At the same time, they also referred to the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament, baptism is also characterised as ‘washing’ and ‘bath’ (cf. Eph 5:26 and Tit 3:5). There is a relationship between baptism as water bath and the washings prescribed in the Old Testament (Versteeg 1983:15). ‘Wash’ was especially linked to the service in the tabernacle and the temple. The priests (Ex 29:4) and Levites (Nm 8:6, 8:7) had to wash themselves and all Israelites had to wash themselves continually to be able to participate in the worship service in the sanctuary (cf. Lv 15). The pure God cannot endure impure people in his presence. Ezekiel predicted that God would bring his people back from exile and that He would sprinkle clean water on them so that they might become clean again (Ezk 36:25). Alongside with this prophecy, God promised to give his people his Spirit so that they would live according to his law (Versteeg 1983:16).

Water also evokes associations with washing. Water purifies. The purification is not only cleansing, but also renewal of life: the old, dirty and worn out is renewed and a new beginning is made. The water bath is therefore also a symbol of inner renewal (Immink 2011:178). Jesus says to Nicodemus, ‘I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit’ (Jn 3:5). The ‘water’ indicates washing off sins and the ‘Spirit’ the wonderful action on the side of God in which the human being is renewed inwardly. Ephesians 5:25–27 speaks of Christ’s love for the church, his giving himself up for her to consecrate her and cleansing her by water. Hebrews 10:22 says we have our guilty hearts sprinkled clean, ‘our bodies washed with pure water’. In 1 Peter, the writer mentions the ark of Noah, which prefigured baptism. The writer stresses that the washing is not of bodily pollution, but that it ‘brings salvation’. In Titus 3:5, it is written that He saved us by the bath of rebirth and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. In the classic form for baptism and in the Heidelberg Catechism (Question

69), water functions especially as an image of washing off (Immink 2011:179). The washing is concerned with the forgiveness of sins and with living in an atoning relationship with God: ‘God forgave us because our sins were washed away. This perhaps is the clearest message conveyed in this sacrament’ (Clark 2003:172).

Water as symbol of immersion and rising

An old legend tells when Jesus went under into the water at his baptism the shadow of the cross fell on the water. It is a mere legend, but Jesus himself understood his own baptism as referring to his death (Mk 10:38). Baptism ‘into the Name of Jesus’ (Ac 2:38) means the baptised is now owned by Christ; thus, he or she is made part of the actions of Christ and all that happened to him. The baptismal command that comes from the mouth of Jesus after his resurrection is the consequence of his entire baptismal existence of suffering, death and resurrection; therefore, it is in no way a surprising supplement to the gospel (Barnard 1998:288). In the rest of the New Testament, the baptismal practice is always linked with the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus (e.g. Rm 6:3).

Baptism involves us in the history of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Rm 6:3, 6:4). Whoever is brought into communion with and under the reign of Christ, as depicted and confirmed by baptism, draws a line through his or her past. Having relinquished the power of sin, he or she lives for God under the new reign of Christ. In baptism, we discover our identity in Christ. One of the most common ways of speaking about baptism in the New Testament, particularly in Paul’s letters, is to refer to it as death or drowning. In baptism, we die to old definitions of ourselves and rise to discover our identity in Christ (Dueck 2011:25).

Paul writes in Colossians 2:11–12 about abandoning the sinful nature saying:

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

These verses do not contend that baptism brings about literal burial with Christ, but that the baptised now participates in the benefaction signified by the words ‘having been buried with him in baptism’ (Cambell 1999:283). In baptism, a person is not only buried with Christ, but too raised with him. Here also, ‘raised’ is meant in a revelation–historical sense (Crowley 1988:291). Being raised with Christ refers to the breakthrough of the new way of life that belongs to the time of salvation in the resurrection of Christ.

The salvation that was given and to which baptism refers is experienced through faith. This revelation–historical truth is given to us in a sacramental way in baptism (Immink 2011:178). Baptism refers back to the revelation–historical truth in Christ, and from it, the meaning of baptism is derived. This first letter of Peter, sometimes described as a sermon on



baptism, shows in 3:21 that the meaning of baptism is found in a prayer to God for a new life through the resurrection of Christ (Harrington 2001:74). It represents the death of the old life, as well as a resurrection to a new life (Burrows 1999:114).

According to Alms (2011):

We are baptized into his death. With the baptismal floodwaters, we go down into that earth with Christ. The waters bury us in the ground with him. It is there finally that death loses its grip on us. Christ is the seed planted in the earth that the greedy grave cannot digest. Christ is planted as seed and the earth must do what God intended it to do before the fall, before the curse, before Abel's blood stained it. It must give birth to life. (p. 184)

In the classical Reformed form prayer, going under (dying) and coming up (new life) together with Christ are connected to two episodes related to water, namely the Flood and the passing through the Red Sea.

It is part of the prayer's praise and thanksgiving towards God, who controls and uses the waters:

From the midst of our watery earth, aware of our need for water simply to live, we give thanks, believing that God has made the water and used the water again and again to save or recreate. (Lathrop 2009:104)

The reference to the Flood clearly goes back to 1 Peter 3:20b and 21a. It concerns the saving functioning of water. Water saved Noah and his family from the world of ungodliness and of judgement. In the same way, baptism refers to the salvation of the Christian congregation who has to live in an impious world. A supplementary thought to 1 Peter 3 may be that the same water of the Flood also functioned in a punitive and judgemental way (Trimp 1983:181). Baptism is also fulfilment of what had already been indicated by the passing through the Red Sea. The water brought separation between the people of God and the power of sin. Now there is an unbreakable bond between the baptised, who lives up to his or her baptismal promise, and Christ. In the Reform tradition, calling upon the Holy Spirit forms a subsection of the Flood prayer (Immink 2011:176).

Because the baptised were truly raised with Christ (Rm 6:4-14), they are going to lead new lives. Baptism symbolises change:

We were buried with Christ through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too may live a new life that we should no longer be slaves to sin. In the same way, we count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Clark 2003:174)

Application of the experience of baptism on pollution of water

The baptised is equipped to bring about change in water pollution

Equipped to witness

Baptism is a gift of God to his church to fill the baptised with joy so that they may become powerful witnesses of the gospel in every area of life, also as regards ecological aspects.

Baptism is the sign of the core message of the gospel, because baptism communicates atonement with God through Christ, our unity with Christ, the sanctification by the Holy Spirit and being part of God's covenant with us (Clark 2003:171).

Equipped to care with a new hart

God is acting in baptism. He addresses us through baptism. He washes off our sins and purifies us. He allows us to participate in his death and resurrection:

The sacrament of baptism is intended by God to feed our faith, to comfort and assure us. Thus, the focus of this ordinance must be on what God has done and is doing for us. (Clark 2003:180)

According to Thompsett (2004:10), '[b]aptism is an expression of God's hope for a people: created, chosen and adopted anew as God's own'. The baptised that embraces God's baptismal promises in faith, is empowered by God to react gratefully in deeds to his benefits. He or she may therefore care with a new heart for water, which is provided by God.

Equipped to serve the whole live

To be baptised does not only concern the salvation and purification in Jesus and the acceptance of the Father's promises; it also indicates the beginning and continuation of the work of the Son of God through his Spirit. The purifying work and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit are thematically indicated in the baptismal formulation in Matthew 28. Baptism also depicts the change in the baptised, because through faith he or she lives a new life, freed from the power of sin. Witvliet (1997) states:

Christian life is a true turning of our life to God, a turning arises from a pure and earnest fear of him and which consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit. (p. 154)

Through the indwelling and governing of the Spirit the baptised can show the influence of the new life in deeds, also in his or her handling of the pollution of water.

Equipped to include conservation of water as part of the comprehensive testimony

Through baptism, each newly baptised person is incorporated into the church of Christ: 'It is an assembly of assemblies or one worldwide assembly of those who are made witnesses to God's salvation of all things' (Lathrop 2009:108). The fact that Christ instituted baptism with his great command to the church to make disciples and to break through boundaries makes the conservation and provision of clean water, especially to the poorest of the poor, also part of the comprehensive testimony of the baptised.

Equipped to change perceptions on value of water

By embracing the promises of baptism, the baptised are equipped to change their own perceptions of the value of water and to promote change in others in this regard. Change in perceptions is one of the most important prerequisites to combat the pollution of water.



Use of liturgical actions in baptism

The presence of God

In the midst of the crisis of water pollution, one of the biggest spiritual challenges believers are facing is to experience the presence of God in baptism. The reason is if one remembers the presence of God specifically during the liturgical act of baptism, one will surely remember the creative work of God and his gift of water to the human being. God's action in baptism allows this ritual to contribute towards further shaping the characters of baptised persons. From their strengthened Christian characters, action in the outside world may be expected, especially regarding water, which is so clearly visible in baptism.

Preaching and teaching on baptism

In equipping preaching on baptism, as well as in teaching on baptism to parents and children, contact with the water of earth ought to be diligently discussed. McGann (2012) refers to this meeting with earth and its water resources as follows:

Encounter with the earth in all its beauty leads to awe and thanksgiving while confrontation with its degradation and suffering leads to lament, even repentance. Awe, thanks, lament, repentance: these are essentials of worship. Yet, too often our liturgies fail to make the connection – fail to reveal that creation is the matrix in which human life, in its journey of salvation, is wholly embedded and from which it cannot ever be separated. (p. 49)

The gift of water and the scope of water pollution ought to be concretely related to the fact that baptism goes hand in hand with water.

Prayer in the ministering of baptism in the worship service

The prayer before and after ministering baptism is of great importance, and from time to time it ought to consider the relationship between baptism, on the one hand, and water and water pollution on the other hand. By doing that, we acknowledge the problem of water pollution and that the change of the human heart in this regard is too big for us to handle:

When we turn to God in worship, can we carry this devastated world with us to the throne of heaven, to put it in the hands of Jesus Christ who sits forever at God's right hand, interceding for that world of which in his flesh and in his suffering he became one? (Power 2010:290)

Lament in the ministering of baptism in the worship service

Part of the prayer at baptism sometimes also ought to include the confession of sin of water pollution, even confession on behalf of local and national governments that cause this pollution through negligence. Hessel-Robinson's (2012) reference to the damage caused to creation could just as well be applied to the damage caused to water in creation:

Penitence has a role in liturgy; prayers of confession for our sins against the earth are appropriate and necessary. However, there should also be a place in our worship for simply mourning the

damage being done to creation, for giving voice to the suffering of the earth and to the anger, sadness, and anxiety we feel as a result. It is necessary to connect lament to the ecological crisis: the prayer of lament for despised and damaged bodies today must include the body of nature, ravaged by greed, exploitation, and reckless abuse. In mourning the damage done to bodies – the bodies of humans, animals, mountains, trees, oceans, rivers, prairies – lament confirms their value and protests their abuse. Christian worship and spirituality have too long offered up a vision of salvation, of communion with God, as something achieved in an otherworldly realm far removed from this material world. In the process, the body – human bodies and other bodies of earth – have been denigrated as inferior or even corrupt. (p. 44)

Calvin (1975) connects the lament to the sacrament of baptism:

You will therefore speak most aptly if you call baptism the sacrament of penance, since it has been given to those who are intent on repentance as a confirmation of grace and a seal of assurance. (IV.19.17)

Visual introduction of water in the worship service

In the liturgical actions, the visual introduction of water may take place in several ways. The early Christians compared the baptismal water to the amniotic fluid of the womb. A new birth truly takes place in every baptism. Baptism becomes the fons vitae, 'a well of water springing up into everlasting life' (Jn 4:14), 'the fountain of life' (Ps 36:9). The baptismal font assumes the centre-point in the universe with every baptism, and everyone may drink from it and experience the cleansing it offers (Buitendag 2005:75). Visual projection of running water and examples of polluted and pure water may be shown during baptism. Examples of pure water and polluted water may be placed in front of the congregation to be literally visible. Even a kind of running fountain may be installed to illustrate something of baptism in the second century. Though we may not disapprove of the practice, immersion is not used in the reformed tradition anymore. However, we may indicate the symbolism of going under with Christ (dying) and coming up from the water (being raised) by depiction.

The cosmological resonance of water must be indicated in the worship service at all times. Water must be central in the liturgical communication. Indeed, water connects heaven and earth. It gives us a place, not only on this blue planet, but also in the entire creation. It broadens the meaning of baptism by its cosmological implication (Buitendag 2005:75).

Conclusion

The question considered in this article is whether an intensified experience of baptism could contribute to making baptised people more sensitive to the need of combating waste in our rivers and dams, as well pollution in general. The question can be answered positively: baptismal celebrations can become a means through which baptised Christians better come to terms not to harm but to respect and enhance the ecological value of water. Because of serious water pollution in Africa, especially in the SADC countries, believers on this



continent ought to bear much stronger witness, in words and deeds, on the necessity of combating water pollution. The goal is to bring about a change in perceptions of the value and conservation of pure water, not only of the perceptions of persons at management level, but also of ordinary members of the public.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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