

The Practice Of Baptism And Its Justification In Anglican Church

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Abstract: *This work was carried out on the sacrament of baptism from the perspective of the Anglican Church. The aims and objectives of the paper are: To examine the modes of baptism in Anglican liturgy, to know the spirituality of baptism to the Anglican Church; and to investigate the justifications for infant baptism in Anglican denomination. To achieve these objectives, exegetical and polemical approaches were employed. Consequently, it was discovered that total immersion is not strongly encouraged in Anglican Church. Rather, Affusion, and Aspersion are considered as having equal validity and spirituality with immersion. The work contributes to knowledge by submitting that: Infant baptism enhances the spiritual consciousness of the Anglican youth; and also arouses their characters of chastity and piety thereby reducing criminalities and delinquencies among the Anglican youth.*

Keywords: *Anglican, baptism, infant, sacrament, spirituality.*

I. Introduction:

Anglican believes in certain sacraments as a means by which grace and forgiveness can be attained. In the liturgy of Anglican, the Thirty-Nine Articles stipulates that Baptism was instituted by Jesus Christ for human salvation. Baptism is called sacrament of the gospel. However, there are five others known as the sacraments of unction of the Holy Spirit. These include the sacrament of reconciliation; that is, confession and absolution, holy matrimony, confirmation, ordination and anointing of the sick. Anglican teaches that sacraments are visible symbols of the invisible grace. For example, water in Baptism is the visible sign that helps to transmit sanctification on the individual communicants that receive the sacrament. Anglican tradition allows only the priests to administer baptism but during emergency a deacon, lay-readers and wardens may be allowed.

It is necessary to indicate that Anglican Church is divided into two classes; the High Church and the Low Church. The High Churchmanship Anglican is close to Catholicism in doctrines and practices while the Low Church has the attributes of Protestantism in both liturgy and belief. For instance, the Low Church teaches only two sacraments, Baptism and Eucharist. But the High Church affirms seven sacraments as obtained in the catholic belief.

II. The Liturgical place of Baptism in Anglican Church:

Baptism is the second sacrament of the gospel in Anglican Church (Mat: 28:18-20). It is performed within or outside the church premises for anyone who has just become a Christian or the infants being born into Christianity. Anglican will never baptize anyone who has not received Jesus as Lord and Saviour and those who are baptized begin a new life in union with Jesus Christ. This means that the baptized person is now sharing the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Baptism is like a funeral combined with a birthday. We who are under God's wrath are condemned to death, as Christ was condemned. But then, having died, we rise again to a new life of fellowship with God.¹

Baptism is a rite of initiation into the Christian faith whereby a person becomes a member of the household of God. It is a sacrament that makes people to renounce sins and evil acts. The Physical symbols in Anglican baptism are: cross, water and candle; and the baptismal service is conducted at the western door where the Font for storing water is located. The officiating minister makes a sign of the cross on the forehead of the baptismal candidate and say:

¹ Roger Bowen, *A Guide to Romans* (London: SPCK, 1975), 202.

We receive this person into the congregation of Christ's flock; and do sign him/her with the sign of the cross in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified and manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil.²

The use of water, however, symbolizes the outward washing of sin for the inward grace of living a new life to begin in the person; while the use of a candle symbolically connotes a transformation from darkness and sinfulness to righteousness and holiness. In Anglican Church the only qualification for a church burial is baptism and not the age or position of the deceased. A child is entitled to funeral service in the church if the bereaved family consents to it.

III. The Modes of Baptism and the position of Anglican Church

The first mode of baptism is immersion and it comes from the Greek word *baptizo* which means "to immerse" or "to dip." By this method, the candidate is completely submerged into the water (Mk1:10). This demonstrates a clear picture of burial and resurrection than the other two methods and it signifies that the baptized person was buried with Jesus with the old life and now dead to sin; and coming out of water symbolizes rising with the risen Lord; and should henceforth live a new life. (Rom.6:3^{ff}; Col.2:12). "As the death makes a mighty change so our baptism signifies our cutting off from the kingdom of sin we profess to have no more to do with sin."³

Immersion was a baptism John used to call the Jews to repentance. The Jews were made to dip their entire bodies under the river in the presence of John. It was a sign of being cleaned from old sins, and being ready for God.⁴ Robin Keeley considers that Jesus' baptism by John was not just by immersion but by water and spirit to signify the greater gift of new birth.⁵

Immersion by total submersion of the whole body is not strongly supported in Anglican Church, rather a partial immersion is considered safer for baptismal candidate. Anglican considers it tautological to claim that a particular mode of baptism is more valid than the others. The validity of baptism is not in the mode but in the symbol and the ritual norms involved. For instance, in the early Church various forms of baptism were adopted to meet the exigency and each prevailing situation. Sometimes candidates were made to stand on a river and water was poured upon them from their heads downward.⁶ Lawrie Guy also wrote that:

Immersion was probably the norms, but that at various times and places full immersion, partial immersion and Affusion were probably in use. Nevertheless, we conclude that out of the three modes immersion carries the strongest case exegetically, historically, and theologically.⁷

The second mode of baptism is Affusion taken from the Latin word *Affusio* which means "to pour on."⁸ The Greek word for "pouring of water" is *cheo*. This method is used in Anglican Church by pouring water on the candidate's head three times. This is probably the best alternative for immersion. Anglican believes that either Affusion or Aspersio is good in all situations, to all ages; and to all health conditions; and that they have equal validity with immersion. The Didache in AD 100 recommended the use of Affusion that:

If you have no living water, baptize into other water,
and if you cannot do so in cold water, do so in warm.
But if you have neither, pour out water three times
upon the head into the name of Father and Son and
Holy Spirit.⁹

The third mode of baptism practised in Anglican Church is Aspersio. The Greek word for Aspersio (sprinkling) is *Rantizo*. This is a special method administered to the infirm, the physically challenged and the old

² Anglican Communion, *Book of Common Prayer* (England: C.S.S Bookshops, 1979), 857.

³ Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the whole Bible* (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 2207.

⁴ John Hargreaves, *A Guide to St Mark Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1989), 8.

⁵ White E.G. *The Desire of Ages* (USA: Harvestime Books), 464.

⁶ Tony Meakin, *A Basic Church Dictionary* (Canterbury: Canterbury Press, 2001), 18.

⁷ Wikipedia, *Immersion Baptism*.

⁸ Wikipedia, *Immersion Baptism*.

⁹ Wikipedia, *Immersion Baptism*.

people. Also, infants are admitted to the Church through this type of baptism. Considering Asperion and Affusion, Cyprian argued that it was not the volume of water or the mode of baptism administered that is important but faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁰

Asperion (Sprinkling) is scriptural and can be traced to the book of Ezekiel 36:25 – 30: “I will sprinkle clean water on you and everything else that has defiled you. I will give you a new heart and a new mind.” The most important things in baptism are: water, faith and the application of Trinitarian formula¹¹. This is the basis of Anglican position that once the fundamental principle of cleansing, purification, and dead to sin and resurrected to new life is invoked in the rite of baptism any type of baptism administered is valid. Therefore, the symbolic burial referred to in Rom. 6:4; Col.2:12 is not a reference to immersion but to a spiritual death, burial, resurrection and new life. The Anglican Church maintains that:

The Bible simply uses a generic word to denote an action designed to produce a certain effect; namely, cleansing and purification, but nowhere determines the specific mode or method in which the effects are to be produced. And Jesus does not specify any particular mode for his disciples when he commissioned them to the act of baptism after his resurrection (Mat. 28:18 – 19).¹²

Berkhof agrees with Anglican position that the Bible does not specify the actual mode by which converts should be baptized. But “as long as the fundamental idea finds expression in the rite, the mode is unnecessary.”¹³ Also, it is important to indicate that the administration of baptism in Anglican Church is in conformity with the early church practice of discretionary baptism whereby the mode of baptism adopted is always circumstantial.

In the Anglican Church candidates for baptism are instructed to make a creedal statement of accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The priest shall also admonish each person to be baptized to renounce the devil and all his works, to abstain from all the satanic acts; and vain glory of the world and to purify themselves from all carnal desires of the flesh. After renunciation by the candidates, the priest will make an invocation saying:

Grant that the old Adam in these persons may be so buried, that the new man may be raised up in them. Grant that all carnal affections may die in them and that all things belonging to the spirit may live and grow in them. Grant that they may have power and strength, to have victory, and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh.¹⁴

Then, the priest will take each of the baptismal candidates by the right hand and instructs the Godparents to pronounce his baptismal name. The priest, having heard the name, pours water upon the candidate three times and also makes a sign of the cross on the forehead of the candidate. It is to be noted that the Anglican catechism connects baptism with Confirmation rite i.e. the laying on of hands of the Bishop upon those that have been baptized and have come to years of discretion. The practice of Confirmation, after Baptism, is drawn from Acts 8:16

IV. Justification for Affusion and Asperion Baptism

The Anglican Church does not insist on immersion like the Baptist and some of the Pentecostal churches because of the following reasons:

First, Anglican believes that the Lucan concept of baptism suggests Affusion. Luke gave a picture of Affusion in the coming of the Holy Spirit at the Pentecostal experience of the early church (Acts 2:17, 18, 33; 10:45). When the Holy Spirit came to empower the believers, the Holy Spirit was “poured out” on their heads like a tongue of fire and spread out and touched each person there until they were completely immersed in Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-5). The same word “baptized” that was used to refer to water baptism by John the Baptist is also

¹⁰ Berkhof L, *Systematic Theology* (Michigan: Erdmans Publishers, 1983), 627-628.

¹¹ Didache, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1980), 175-176.

¹² Olufosoye T.O, *Glossary of Ecclesiastical Term* (Ibadan: University Press, 1987), 2-3.

¹³ Berkhof L., *Systematic Theology*, 629.

¹⁴ Anglican Communion, *Book of Common Prayer*, 624.

used to describe fire baptism by the Holy Spirit. “John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). This shows the validity of Affusion as a mode of baptism.

Second, the baptism of the household of Cornelius appears to be by Affusion. Luke said that Peter was surprised that the Holy Spirit has been poured out even on the Gentiles (Acts 10:45). The baptism was spontaneous and unpremeditated; and It took place inside Cornelius’ house “with relatives and close friends that had been invited” (Acts 10:25). Surprisingly, “While Peter was still speaking the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening to the message” (Acts 10:44). Peter then exclaimed: “These people have received the Holy Spirit just as we also did. Can anyone, then, stop them from being baptized with water?” so he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:48). It is evidently clear from this passage that water might have been brought into the house for the entire people to be baptized by Affusion or Aspersions and not by immersion.

Third, Anglican Church holds the view that for three thousand People to be baptized through immersion in the house within a day by Peter and the other eleven apostles is impracticable (Acts 1:13). The Scripture says: “Suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2). The clear indication here is that Affusion or Aspersions mode of baptism might have been administered for such a large numbers of people. In short, the site where the three thousand people were baptized; whether in the upper room or in the public square could not allow immersion.

Fourth, the baptism of the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:33) is another one which could not have been by immersion since it happened in the prison yard and in the midnight. The jailer was astonished when he saw the miracle of liberation of Paul and Silas that forced the prison doors opened. He thought the prisoners had escaped so he was terrified; but having been encouraged by Paul, he accepted Jesus Christ. Immediately, he took Paul and Silas from the inner prison to his official apartment within the prison yard and was baptized with his household before the daylight. It is plausible, therefore, to conclude that such a spontaneous and unpremeditated baptism carried out in the night; within the prison yard and which must not be known to the authority must have been by Affusion or Aspersions because of the exigency and the illegality of the exercise.

Fifth, the Ethiopian baptism by Philip (Acts 8:26-39) is another consideration. The fact that they went down into the river or water does not rule out the possibility of Affusion or Aspersions. That “both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water” (Acts 8:38); can also suggest a steep descend through the bank of the river. The adjoining statement that “when they came up out of the water” (Acts 8:39), shows clearly that the exercise was not an immersion since it is impossible for both the baptizer and the baptized to be jointly submerged into the water. Hence, the statement, “when they came up out of the water” means when they climbed up the bank of the river.

V. The Spirituality of Baptism to the Anglican

First, Anglican believes that baptism is symbolic of the Old Testament circumcision. It is a mark of membership of the covenant community of Christian church.¹⁵ For this reason, Paul teaches that in Jesus all Christians were circumcised “in the putting off of the sinful nature not with a circumcision done by the hands of men” (Col. 2:11).

Second, Baptism is a symbol of unity within Anglican Communion universally. People who are baptized into the Anglican Church become corporate members of the body of Christ. Baptism makes Anglican universal, equal and one spiritual body with one Lord. “The New Testament depicts the church as a visible body of Christ; as a result, race, gender and social status is transcended in Christ.”¹⁶ Paul addressed the equality of believers that everyone baptized into Christ is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female but all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:27-28).

Third, baptism implies change and renunciation. The baptized person has become born again with a new status, new way of live, new orientation and new concept. Submission to baptism means renunciation of old life. An immediate change in lifestyle is noticed by others in the community.¹⁷ By baptism regeneration takes place and it makes the new convert known the truth of the gospel. Baptism is a symbol of grace that makes someone fit to benefit from the sacrificial death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The grace which makes salvation available is thus opened to the baptized person. The sins of the baptized persons are now being forgiven. McCain observes that:

Just as water is commonly used for literal and physical washing, so the water of the sacrament of baptism is used

¹⁵ Hant G, *Right to Baptism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1966), 24.

¹⁶ Hant, *Right to Baptism*

¹⁷ McCain, *We Believe*.

to expressed moral and spiritual cleansing. Cleansing from sin is the essential ingredient of Christian conversion and no one can become a Christian without repentance. Baptism is a standing testimony to the reality that one's sin has been forgiven.¹⁸

VI. The Justification of Infant Baptism in Anglican

Infant baptism is part of Anglicanism and it is of equal essence regardless of whether it is administered to the infants or to the adults. Anglican maintains that infants cannot be alienated from the divine scheme of God. The Anglican rubric in the Book of Common Prayer enjoins the church adherent:

That they defer not the baptism of their children longer than the first or second Sunday next after their birth, or other holy-day falling between, unless upon a great and reasonable cause, to be approved by the curate. And also they shall warn them, that without like great cause and necessity they procure not their children to be baptized at home in their houses.¹⁹

Baptism of infant is one of the most controversial practices of the Anglican Church. Many people are of the opinion that it is unnecessary because they opine that it is unscriptural. Some believe that infants cannot profess or confess Jesus; and to some other people; infants are sinless and therefore do not need baptism. Infant objectionists insist that active faith is required for baptism. Consequently, only adults who can affirm their faith in Jesus should be baptized.²⁰ The objectionist school claims further that baptism symbolizes circumcision in the New Testament. This baptismal circumcision is of the heart and spirit which infants are not mature to exercise.²¹ The Anglican Church justifies infant's baptism with many arguments:

First, in the Old Testament promises to parents; children were not exempted from the covenant. For instance, the covenant of God with Abraham was centered on Abraham's offspring. (Gen 15:4-4).

Second, Peter informed his audience that the promise of Holy Spirit is for the parents, adults and their children (Acts 2:38). Since children are included in the promise of Holy Spirit to deny them baptism is a sin against God.

Third, parents are accountable to God concerning their children. Parents can be punished for negligence over their children. Eli's household was punished for his failure to restrain his faithless children (1Sam.3:13-14). The leadership position of the house of Samuel was abrogated because "his sons did not walk in his ways" (1Sam 8:3).

Fourth, Anglican claims that the household baptism in the early church included infants. In support of this view, Jeremias submitted that the term "oikos" the Greek term meaning "house" includes infants and slaves. Jeremias emphasizes that:

When the apostles employed the term to refer to household baptism, they understood the implication, and if they had wished to exclude infants; then, they would have used a different term. Therefore household baptism implies infant's baptism.²²

Some of the households of the early church's converts who were baptized include: Lydia (Acts 16:15), the jailer (Acts 16:32), Stephanas (1Cor. 1:16) and Cornelius (Acts 10:24-28). All these baptism were done in spontaneity.

Fifth, Anglican supports the practice of infant baptism with Jesus' invitation to little children that: "let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mk 10:13-16). Also, Paul calls both Christian parents and children 'holy' (1Cor. 7:14), Also, Jesus who instituted the sacrament of baptism referred to children as worthy of the kingdom of heaven (Mk. 10:16-17).

¹⁸ Mccain, *We Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Jos: Capromedia, 1996), 88-89.

¹⁹ Anglican Communion, *Book of Common Prayer*, 272.

²⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 623.

²¹ Ona E. *The validity of Christian Baptism* (Onitsha: Donmark Press, 2000), 112-113.

²² Jeremias J, *Infants Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (London: S.C.M Press, 1960), 22.

Consequently, for the Church to prevent someone adjudged worthy of God's kingdom is sacrilegious.

Sixth, Anglican cited Origen who was quoted to have said: "The church has received a tradition from the apostles to administer baptism also to little children."²³ This is an earliest witness to the belief that the apostles practised infant's baptism. For Origen who was a church father in the third century to affirm infant's baptism among the early church lends credence to Anglican practice in the contemporary time. It should be noted, however, that Tertullian and Polycarp objected to infant's baptism on the ground that infants could reject the Christian faith when they are old. This is not a lucid argument because there is no assurance that adults themselves could not renounce their faith at any time. However, Polycarp-Tertullian objection confirms that infant's baptism was practised in the apostolic period. To address the probability of infant's renunciation of faith in future, the Anglican Church makes provision for Godparents to oversee the spiritual welfare of the infants from the time they were baptized. The Godfathers and Godmothers are to ensure that the child is "virtuously brought up to live a godly and Christian life" and they must see that the infant is taught words of God; until the child is old and is brought for confirmation rite, the Godparents remain the spiritual guidance.²⁴

VII. The Religious Education and the Lessons of Baptism

It is necessary to analyze the lessons and religious education of baptism that: It is a sacrament that raises the cautiousness of the Christian to appreciate the sacrificial death of Jesus as the only means of salvation. Hence, believers proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus through the mystery of being born again by water and spirit. The practice of infant baptism in the Orthodox Church is synonymous to the Old Testament rite where all male children of Jewish origin and converts were initiated to Judaism through circumcision; and by implication it offers the Christian the opportunity of grace and mercy of God which cannot be attained on personal merit.

By baptism people are liberated from the clutches of Satan, exorcised from evil spirits and rescued from the kingdom of darkness. So, it makes forgiveness of sins and deliverance from eternal death possible since everyone including infants and adults are conceived and born in sin (Psalm 51:5). Through baptism the Holy Spirit takes possession and empowers human will to be submissive to God.

Baptism makes us regenerated members of the body of Christ, because as water in the baptism serves as external symbol for inward cleansing so also the blood of Jesus cleanses us from the generic sin. "Every soul that is born into the flesh is soiled by the filth of wickedness and sin; therefore, there is the need for baptismal sacrament."²⁵

Although baptism is not the means by which we are saved, it is the means by which we are set apart. By baptism, we testify that we are no longer our own, we have been bought by Christ's blood and have been brought into the community of faith.²⁶

Anyone who has been baptized through the Trinitarian formula is entrenched into the authority and power of God with a special privilege of brotherhood, adoption as children of God and co-heirs with Jesus in the heavenly kingdom. In other words, baptism brings a change to our status with God now that we are dead to sin we become enlisted into the Lamb's book of salvation.

Baptism is not a mere religious responsibility, but an incredible privilege which is not optional but a compulsory sacrament to become a Christian. "The un-baptized persons are not Christians no matter their religious commitment and dedication."²⁷

In conclusion, baptism enhances chastity and piety among the youth, thereby creating a sense of belonging and spiritual consciousness in them as they grow in age. It makes the Orthodox Churches living and growing. That is, it increases youth dedication and active participation in Church programs and religious activities; and, it helps to develop the leadership potentials of the youth as some of them later become Church ministers, great gospel singers and musicians

²³ Jeremias J, *Infants Baptism*.

²⁴ Anglican Communion, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 278.

²⁵ Bernadeane Carr, *Early Teaching on infants Baptism*, retrieved from www.catholic.com, last modified 2 February, 2015.

²⁶ Hank Hanegraaff, *The Important of Baptism*, Christian Research Institute, retrieved from www.equip.org, last modified 7 February, 2015.

²⁷ Andrew, *Infants Baptism*, retrieved from www.andrewerrington.net, last modified 21 January, 2015.

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