

# Washing, Repentance, and Atonement in Early Christian Baptism and Qumranic Purification Liturgies

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The origin, function, and meaning of baptism at the baptism of John the Baptist and for first-century Christians continue to provoke scholarly discussion and debate.<sup>1</sup> The ritual ablutions in Qumran were regarded by some as providing a background, and at times even as the origin, for John's baptism.<sup>2</sup> These studies drew on allusions to ritual immersion in the Community Rule (1QS) and at times also Josephus' Essenes. However, they hardly discussed the recently published so-called purification liturgies (4Q414 and 4Q512), which engage in purification-repentance-atonement in a more detailed and direct manner. The purification liturgies provide better evidence on which further analysis of the baptism of John and early Christian baptism should be grounded.

The first part of this article suggests new observations concerning the similarities and differences between the purification liturgies from Qumran and the NT evidence on the baptism of John. While both involved repentance and atonement, I would like to suggest that the latter did not include purification at all. Yet in both, immersion in water was a ritual that symbolized moral transformation, in which repentance was a precondition for forgiveness and atonement. This ritual would make the repentance sincere and effective.

In the second part of this article, the Qumranic ritual of immersion-purification and repentance as means of atonement will be used as a model for

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<sup>1</sup> E. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009); D. Hallhom, T. Vegge, Ø. Norderval, and C. Hellholm, eds., *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism. Late Antiquity, Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (BZNV 176; Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> For comparisons with Qumran, see, for example, G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962, repr. 1977), 11–18, and below.

interpreting early Christian baptism. I will suggest a new classification of types of baptism in the NT that vary in their concern for washing and repentance as ways to achieve atonement. I will point to the diminishing role of repentance by the early Christians and show that some NT texts on baptism used washing in water as a metaphor for spiritual transformation. This later phenomenon will also shed further light on the meaning of the act of immersion in early Christian rites of baptism.

The present discussion does not concern diachronic developments of early Christian baptism. It aims to show the various meanings of baptism and the complexity of the connections between washing in water, atonement, and spiritual transformation, stressing the differences between the Qumranic and early Christian rites.

### **Immersion, Purification, Sin, and Atonement in Qumran**

#### *Moral Purification in Qumran*

In Qumran, ritual purity is linked with morality. In the Hodayot (1QH<sup>a</sup>), sin is portrayed as defilement, and God's forgiveness and atonement are regarded as purification from guilt.<sup>3</sup> 1QS 5:13–14, for example, commands repentance before one is ritually cleansed.<sup>4</sup>

Similar linkages between ritual impurity and atonement are attested to in 1QS 3:6–12. The authors stress that atonement for the member's iniquities (תְּכֹפֶר חַטָּוֹת) is achieved by uprightness, humility, and compliance with all the laws of God, in addition to cleansing one's flesh with water (לְהִתְקַדֵּשׁ בְּמֵי דוּכָי). To the Qumran sectarians, sin is actually ritually defiling, not merely

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<sup>3</sup> 1QH 12:30 [Sukenik 4:39]; 19:13–14 [11:10–11]; 19:33–34 [11:30–31]; 15:33 [7:30]. Cf. 1QS 11:14–15. On the use of metaphors of impurity-sin, purity-righteousness, and purification-atonement in 1QS and the Hodayot (but not in the purification liturgies), see Susan Haber, "Metaphor and Meaning in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in idem, *They Shall Purify Themselves: Essays on Purity in Early Judaism* (SBL: Atlanta, 2008), 93–106.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., J. Licht, *The Rule Scroll* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1965), 74–76, 128–29 (Hebrew). This is acknowledged even by M. Himmelfarb, "Impurity and Sin in 4QD, 1QS, and 4Q512," *DSD* 8 (2001): 9–37 (34), who argued that in other passages the relationship between impurity and sin is merely metaphorical. Translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls follow F. García Martínez and J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scroll Study Edition* (Leiden, Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Brill and Eerdmans, 2000) unless noted otherwise.

metaphorically. Ritual and moral impurity are merged into a single concept of defilement.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the evidence of 1QS 5:13–14 (discussed above), Himmelfarb has doubted the significance which the *Yāhad* accorded to moral impurity, arguing that it was regarded as merely a metaphor for sin, as a matter of speech rather than an actual defiling force with negative consequences.<sup>6</sup> However, the purification liturgies of the Qumran sectarians, which describe purification rites, add further evidence that the manner in which ritual practice is interwoven with atonement of sin demonstrates that it is more than metaphorical.

*Pure Atonement: The Qumranic Purification Liturgies*

4Q512 *Ritual of Purification B* consists of prayers and blessings recited before or after ritual immersion or sprinkling the ashes (for cleansing from corpse impurity) while the cleansed person—defiled from corpse impurity or genital discharge, or immersing before Sabbaths and festivals—was still standing in the water.<sup>7</sup> The fragmentary text contains three components: confessions (“I have sinned”),<sup>8</sup> forgiveness for “hidden trespasses of guilt” ([הַסְתֵּרֵי אֲשַׁמְתָּה]),<sup>9</sup> and

<sup>5</sup> J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 75–77, 85–88, pointing to 1QS 4:9–10, 21; 7:17–18. For the reception of Klawans’ study, see I. Werrett, “The Evolution of Purity at Qumran,” in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, ed. C. Frevel and C. Nihan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 507–10; G. Holtz, “Purity Conceptions in the Dead Sea Scrolls: ‘Ritual Physical’ and ‘Moral’ Purity in a Diachronic Perspective,” in *ibid.*, 519–36. See also D. Flusser, “The Baptism of John and the Dead Sea Sect” in *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1979), 81–112 (85–88) [Hebrew]; B. E. Thiering, “Inner and Outer Cleansing at Qumran as a Background to New Testament Baptism,” *NTS* 26 (1980): 266–77.

<sup>6</sup> Himmelfarb, “Impurity and Sin,” esp. 34, 37.

<sup>7</sup> M. Baillet, *Qumrān grotte 4, III. DJD 7* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 262–86. Col. xii deals with purification from corpse impurity. Cf. also frag. 11 col. x 2; frags. 1–6 xii 1, 3. On purity before Sabbaths and festivals, see frags. 33+35 iv 1. See also J. M. Baumgarten, “The Purification Rituals in *DJD 7*,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Forty Years of Research*, ed. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport (Leiden: Magnes and Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1992), 199–209, here 206–207. For classification of the fragments according to their being recited before or after immersion or sprinkling, see E. Eshel, “414. 4QRitual of Purification A,” in *Qumran Cave 4 25, Halakhic Texts*, ed. J. M. Baumgarten et al., *DJD* 35 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 136.

<sup>8</sup> 4Q512 frag 29–32, vii 9, 18; frag. 28 4; 99 2.

<sup>9</sup> 4Q512 frag. 34 v 15.

thanks “for cleaning me from the turpitude of impurity” (וּתְהַרְנֵי מֵעֲרוּת נֹדָה).<sup>10</sup> While the context is clearly a ritual purification from bodily defilement, it mentions sins and repentance.<sup>11</sup>

The text juxtaposes impurity and sin repeatedly. For example, on the third day of purification from corpse impurity, immediately after references to water and ashes (of the red heifer for purification of corpse impurity), a blessing is recited which includes the word *niddah* (impurity) and in the next line אַשְׁמַתָּם “their guilt,” and then a further reference to כְּפֹרִי [רְצוֹנָךְ] “atonement of [your] will.”<sup>12</sup> In another badly preserved fragment, the words בִּימֵי . . . וְרוּחָךְ “in water, and washed” appear beneath the words עוֹן אֲשָׁמָה “iniquity of guilt.” Several lines further below we find the word עוֹן “iniquity” between two lines that read הַטוּהָרָה “the purity” and טְהַרְתִּי “I was purified.”<sup>13</sup>

The author of the liturgy even coins the expression טְהַרְתָּ צְדִקָּה “purity of righteousness” (or “righteous purity”), which appears twice. This expression means that either purity leads to righteousness, or more likely, righteousness leads to purity. These two components are far from being synonymous, but they are linked together, as the aim of the speaker/author is to attain both simultaneously.<sup>14</sup>

Several times the liturgy discusses sin and atonement: “commanded the temporarily [impure] to purify themselves from the [impurity of] . . . the soul with the atone[ment].”<sup>15</sup> In fact, atonement and holiness are frequently addressed and directly correlated.<sup>16</sup> In one outstanding assertion, the appeal to atonement uses

<sup>10</sup> 4Q512 frags. 33, 35, iv 7. The frequent references to *niddah* in 4Q512 and 4Q414 do not pertain to the literal sense of menstrual impurity, but represent a figural sense of defilement as general designations of impurity (Ezek 36:17; Lam 1:8; 1QS 4:10; 5:19–20; 1QH 19[11]:11). See Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 77–79 (but cf. *ibid.*, 87), *contra* Baillet, *DJD* 7, 263.

<sup>11</sup> [ש] בִּי פָשַׁע “those who repent,” frags. 70–71 2; מִשְׁגָּה “mistake” frags. 29–32 vii 3; [פ] רִוַּשׁ כַּפַּי [ם] “stretch out your hands” (asking for forgiveness) frags. 42–44 ii. See also frag. 23 viii 3; frag. 28 4; frags. 15 i + 16 1, 10; frags. 1–6 xii 12.

<sup>12</sup> 4Q512 frags. 1–6 xii 9–14.

<sup>13</sup> 4Q512 frags. 15+16 9–10, 12.

<sup>14</sup> 4Q512 frags. 29–32 vii 19; frags. 40+41 xiii 5 (for righteousness, see also frag. 72). See also frag. 15 ii.

<sup>15</sup> Frags. 1–6 xii 2–3. See also כִּי טְהַרְתִּי [ם] . . . כְּפֹרִי [ם], “atonement[t] . . . because you have purified me,” frag. 39 ii.

<sup>16</sup> Atonement: frag. 39 ii 1; 29–32 vii 21; 1–6 xii 3. Holiness: frags. 33 + 35 iv 5; 29 + 32 vii 2, 11; 7–9 xi 4 (restored); 1–6 xii 10, 12; 48–50 3; 51–55 9–10; 56–58 3; 64 6.

sacrificial imagery. One of the blessings addresses God, who “[forgave me all] sins and purified me from impure immodesty (ערוות נדה) and atoned so that can enter [ . . . ] purification. And the blood of the *burnt offering agreeable to you [and the p]lea[sa]nt (aroma) agreeable to You*” (frags. 29–32 vii 8–11).

4Q414 *Ritual of Purification A* is an extremely fragmentary liturgy for purification from corpse impurity by immersions on the first, third, and seventh days after becoming impure.<sup>17</sup> Once again, the impurity from which one is being purified has a link to sin: “by what comes of Your lips [the purification of all] (people) [has been required to be separated from all] people of *niddah* according to their *g[uilt]*, they could not be purified in water of purification [ . . . the w]ays of [Your] will.”<sup>18</sup> As in 4Q512, the expression “[purity of] righteousness” reappears.<sup>19</sup> Purification and atonement are mentioned together: והקם לו חוק כפור [ . . . ] להטהר לפני[יכה] “to purify oneself before [you . . . ] and he established for him a regulation of atonement” (13, 2–3). In this significant yet poorly preserved text, atonement is mentioned three times,<sup>20</sup> and holiness (the root *qdsh*, sanctified) is mentioned five.<sup>21</sup>

Himmelfarb denied that sin causes impurity in 4Q512, viewing it as figurative expressions of impurity. She argued that here impurity is merely an indication of human imperfection, not a result of sin, and that impurity is not necessarily sinful: “Because 4Q512 is so fragmentary it is impossible to be certain about the relationship between impurity and sin. . . . While impurity and sin stand side by side, they remain separate. . . . Sin and impurity are understood as two aspects of human finitude, corresponding to soul and body.”<sup>22</sup>

True, there is no explicit statement that the cause of defilement is sin, or vice versa. But Himmelfarb did not account for the reason why impurity and sin are mentioned together in a liturgy recited during ritual immersion; why the

<sup>17</sup> Eshel, “414. 4QRitual of Purification A,” 135–54. See frags. 2 ii 3 and 4 2. The law of ablutions on the first and third days of impurity (in addition to the seventh day, prescribed in Num 19) is already found in Temple Scroll 49:17–20. Note that the script is Herodian (*ibid.*, 135).

<sup>18</sup> 4Q414 frags. 2 ii + 3, 4, lines 7–9 (the restorations are based on the parallel in 4Q512):

כי ממוצא פיכה [נפרשתה טהרת כול להבדל מכל] אנשי נדה כא[שמחם בל יטהרו במי רחץ . . . ] [ד]רכי רצונ[כה].

<sup>19</sup> 4Q414 frags. 27+28 3–4, reconstructed based on the parallel in 4Q512 XIII, frags. 40+41 (Eshel, “414. 4QRitual of Purification A,” 152).

<sup>20</sup> 4Q414 frag. 2 i 3 “to atone for us”; 8, 4 “atonement of [Your] wi[ll]”; 13, 3–4 “and He established for himself a law for atonement [ . . . ] and to be in rig[h]teous[ness] purity.”

<sup>21</sup> 4Q414 frag. 2 ii 1; 7 9; 11 ii 5; 14; 21 2.

<sup>22</sup> Himmelfarb, “Impurity and Sin in 4QD, 1QS, and 4Q512,” 35–36 (citation from p. 36).

person immersed in 4Q512 repents and asks for forgiveness; and why the key issue in these purification rites from bodily impurity is *atonement*. After all, there is no sin in being ritually defiled. Clearly, whatever the source of the guilt that requires atonement, *the purification liturgy was also a liturgy about a release from sin*. The phrase “purity of righteousness” may summarize the purpose of the ritual which accompanies the immersion: forgiveness of sins is assumed during or after a ritual immersion. This ritual concludes when one is both bodily pure *and* righteous.

Given the very fragmentary state of the two texts, and based on other Qumranic sectarian texts in which sin defiles, it is reasonable to assume from these liturgies that the one immersed was cleansed from both bodily impurity (e.g. by corpse) and simultaneously also from moral impurity (derived from sin). Yet, this conclusion is based on circumstantial evidence.

Previous scholars who studied the Essene or Qumranic purification practices (*War* 2.129, 138, 159; *Ant.* 18.19; 1QS 3:4–9; 4:21–22) concluded that these immersions were either initiatory<sup>23</sup> or related to an eschatological belief in the Day of Judgment.<sup>24</sup> In the purification liturgies, however, purification was related to ordinary bodily defilement and hence repeatable.<sup>25</sup> Atonement resulted from repentance and was not necessarily related to the coming judgment. In these respects, as we shall further see below, the Qumranic ritual purification was different from the baptism of John and the early Christians.

Asking for or perhaps even attaining atonement through ritual/bodily purification is a far-reaching innovation. In the Priestly Code, atonement is achieved only through specific sacrifices, including the sacrificial cult on the Day

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<sup>23</sup> L. Cerfaux, “Le baptême des Esséniens,” *Reserhces de science religieuse* 19 (1929): 248–65; O. Betz, “Die Proselytentaufe der Qumransekte und die Taufe im Neuen Testament,” *RevQ* 1 (1958): 213–34; R. L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet. A Socio-Historical Study* (JSNTSup 62; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 159–62.

<sup>24</sup> J. Gnllka, “Die essenischen Tauchbäder und die Johannestaufe,” *RevQ* 3 (1961): 185–207.

<sup>25</sup> See already J. E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 76–88. In fact, the detailed procedure of accepting new members in 1QS 6:13–23 does not mention purification but rather exclusion from the sect “purities.” Cf. J. D. Lawrence, *Washing in Water: Trajectories of Ritual Bathing in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 135–41, who acknowledged the evidence but nevertheless insisted that “bathing was part of the initiation.”

of Atonement.<sup>26</sup> Did the Qumran sectarians manage to substitute sacrifices with a ritual washing as a rite of moral purification to remove sin?

In the Priestly Code, atonement through sacrifices is sometimes preconditioned and accompanied by confession as an act of repentance.<sup>27</sup> The sacrifice operates as a ritual act that materializes repentance into a tangible religious experience using the metaphor of “paying” God for forgiving or purifying the filth caused to the sancta by one’s sins. Moreover, atonement also means purging the altar from the impurity caused by that sin.<sup>28</sup>

It is worth considering the possibility that in Qumran, ritual purification in water substitutes for the sacrificial offering as both the ritual act in which the sinner experiences his repentance and God’s forgiveness, as well as the means for purification from sin.<sup>29</sup> This kind of ritual may be compared to the manner in which some other Jews coped with the problem of repentance for sins by expressing their remorse and desire for forgiveness in plain words. In penitential prayers, confession and pleading to God serve as the acts of repentance without sacrifice, although here atonement remains a petition rather than a result.<sup>30</sup>

The Qumran sectarians, however, believed that they could do better than this. As other sectarian scrolls show, they were sure that their righteousness would merit atonement.<sup>31</sup> The purification liturgies are too fragmentary to merit

<sup>26</sup> J. Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conception* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> In the ritual of the *asham* (guilt) sacrifice in Lev 5, “confession is the legal device fashioned by the priestly legislators to convert deliberate sins into inadvertencies, thereby qualifying them for sacrificial expiation.” J. Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The ASHAM and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 119.

<sup>28</sup> J. Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly ‘Picture of Dorian Gray,’” *RB* 83 (1976): 390–99; Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*.

<sup>29</sup> For atonement (*kpr*) in the sense of purification (from sin) in 1QS and 1QH<sup>a</sup>, see M. Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the letters of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 46–48.

<sup>30</sup> R. A. Werline, “Defining Penitential Prayer,” in *Seeking the Favor of God Vol. 1*, ed. M. J. Boda, D. K. Falk, and R. A. Werline (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), xiii–xvii; E. Chazon, “The Words of the Luminaries and Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Times,” in *Seeking the Favor of God Vol. II*, ed. M. J. Boda, D. K. Falk, and R. A. Werline (Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 177–86.

<sup>31</sup> P. Garnet, *Salvation and Atonement in the Qumran Scrolls* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977). Note, however, the constant self-guilt and the need to achieve atonement within the realm of the sect: E. Regev, *Sectarianism in Qumran: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (RS 45; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 73–80.

a certain conclusion, but it is possible that the immersed person was confident that God would forgive his sins and “justify” him. Since purification and atonement appear together in both liturgies,<sup>32</sup> it seems that a member of the sect actually “experienced” atonement when he came out of the water and completed reciting the liturgy. Yet, unlike the baptism of John and in early Christianity, there is no evidence in Qumran for any intervention by an external human agency or authority; atonement was achieved through the individual’s rite.

The purification liturgies put us in a better position to reexamine other correlations of ritual immersion in water, repentance, and atonement—namely, the baptism of John and early Christian baptism. We shall first distinguish John’s baptism from the Qumranic ritual ablutions in the purification liturgies.

### **The Baptism of John: Moral Transformation and Atonement without Purification**

#### *John’s Baptism in Comparison to Purification in Qumran in Previous Scholarship*

Many have compared the baptism of John with the concept of purification from sin in 1QS, stressing the similarities between them: immersion as an initiation rite, remission of sins by baptism, and moral deeds and repentance as a precondition for immersion.<sup>33</sup> Taylor concluded that in both John’s baptism (according to Josephus) and 1QS 3, immersion-purification requires a prior cleansing of the heart through repentance and righteousness, thus combining ritual purity and a sort of moral/spiritual transformation. Yet the social demands for moral behavior were much stricter in Qumran.<sup>34</sup> Webb rightly noted that in Qumran, repentance not only atones for sin but is also what makes purification by immersion efficacious for atonement. However, as we shall see below, in John’s baptism, according to the gospels, it is repentance *and baptism* which lead to forgiveness and also to a cleansing of the flesh. Thus, the baptism/immersion as an act/symbol of *repentance* is an integral part of achieving atonement.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See especially 4Q512 XII 4–14, 4Q414 2 i 3–4, and the discussion above.

<sup>33</sup> W. H. Brownlee, “John the Baptist in the New Light of Ancient Scrolls,” in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. K. Stendahl (London: SCM Press, 1958; repr. 1992), 33–53 (39–41); J. Daniléou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1958), 22–23; D. Flusser, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Pre-Pauline Christianity,” in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 23–74 (51); idem, “The Baptism of John,” 83–89; B. Thiering, “Qumran Initiation and New Testament Baptism,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 615–31.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *The Immerser*, 81–82.

<sup>35</sup> Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 210–11. See also H. Lichtenberger, “Johannes der Täufer und die Texte von Qumran,” *Mogilany 1989: Papers on the Dead Sea Scrolls Offered in*



Scholars have noted other differences as well. Some have argued that John's baptism was "an act of prophetic symbolism," "being an eschatological rather than ceremonial or ritual purification."<sup>36</sup> Moreover, John's baptism was a single event with distinctive symbolism in contrast to the daily or customary immersions in Qumran; hence, purification in Qumran is not a rite of admission, initiation, or conversion. And as we have already seen, the purification liturgies show that repentance and atonement were related to routine ritual purification.

Webb stressed an essential and revolutionary element found, in his view, in both types of immersions: the possibility to eliminate sin and its corresponding bodily impurity by immersion in water. In what follows I will examine the concept of *atonement by immersion* in the baptism of John and early Christian baptism in light of the insights already gained from the Qumranic purification liturgies: *How does baptism lead to atonement? What further acts, if any, are necessary?*

#### *The Baptism of John: Repentance for the Remission of Sin*

The descriptions of John's baptism in the synoptic Gospels and Acts are quite consistent:

Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3: "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν)

Matt 3:6: "they were baptized . . . confessing their sins."

Acts 13:24: "John proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel."

Acts 19:4: "John baptized with the baptism of repentance."

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*Memory of Jean Carmignac*, ed. Z. J. Kapera (Krakow: Enigma, 1993), 1.139–52. As I have already noted, in the Purification Liturgies ritual purification as a means of atonement is compared to sacrifice. Interestingly, some argued the same in relation to John's baptism. See J. Thomas, *Le Mouvement Baptiste in Palestine et Syrie (150 Av. J.-C.—300 Ap. J.-C.)* (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1935); Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 192–93, 204–205, 211–12. Against this view, see F. Avemarie, "Ist die Johannestaufe ein Ausdruck von Tempelkritik? Skizze eines methodischen Problems," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel. Community without a Temple*, ed. B. Ego, A. Lange, P. Pilhofer (WUNT 118; Tübingen: Mohr, 1999), 395–410. In the case of John, there is no textual evidence for any association with sacrifice. Not every mode of atonement is necessarily sacrificial, and some sacrifices do not atone.

<sup>36</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 85, 87, 88. Cf. Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 212.

In all these cases, baptism is directly linked to repentance, namely, confession of sins and the desire to expunge previous deeds and improve one's behavior. Mark and Luke add that the aim of baptism was (divine) forgiveness. These very aspects are also found in the Qumranic purification liturgies. Yet, it is not entirely clear why baptism is necessary at all. Is not repentance on its own enough to lead to forgiveness?<sup>37</sup>

Matt 3:11 may shed some light on this question. John is cited as saying "I baptize you with water for repentance." Here John's baptism is the *means for repentance*. One may infer that whoever was baptized by John experienced a true and sincere repentance which is more effective in achieving forgiveness. Thus, like the purification liturgies, in John's baptism immersion in water was used as a catalyst for remorse, regret, and a feeling that this spiritual and moral transformation is effective.

According to Mark and Luke, unique to John's baptism is that being baptized *by John* symbolized or demonstrated God's forgiveness. The act of baptism provided the person with the assurance that he/she had indeed been forgiven,<sup>38</sup> just like in the purification liturgies. Thus, forgiveness for sins as the result (or at least as the goal) of John's baptism is mentioned only by Mark and Luke.<sup>39</sup> Still, it is not stated there that John actually granted anyone forgiveness directly. One may suggest that Matthew omitted an explicit reference to forgiveness, since in Matthew only baptism *in the name of Jesus* is effective for atonement (Matt 28:19).<sup>40</sup>

Acts also does not mention the efficacy of John's baptism for forgiving one's sins. Throughout Acts, it is stressed time and again, as a central theological theme, that only the rite of being baptized in the name of Jesus grants the Holy

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<sup>37</sup> E. Lohmeyer, *Das Urchristentum I, Johannes der Täufer*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932) 68–69 argued that repentance or conversion did not lead a man to baptism; he came to baptism to receive it. Hence baptism led to repentance and not vice versa. In contrast, J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 152 maintained that "forgiveness was the result of the repentance, not of the baptism as such."

<sup>38</sup> Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 191. "While atonement is not explicitly mentioned with respect to John's baptism, John's baptism could have been conceived of as a rite of atonement . . ." (ibid., 211).

<sup>39</sup> For a literary analysis of the grammatical connection (in both Greek and Aramaic) between baptism and repentance, see Taylor, *The Immerser*, 97–98.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew's omission of forgiveness may also be related to his stress (Matt 28:19; cf. Mark 16:16) that Jesus himself ordered baptism in his name.

Spirit. In Acts, John's baptism is mentioned as a precursor to the early Christian baptism through fire or spirit. Luke stresses the difference between John's baptism and baptism in the name of Jesus, and the superiority of the latter.<sup>41</sup>

Considering the theological biases of Matthew and Acts, we have good reason to accept the baptism outline of Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3<sup>42</sup> as follows: *repentance–immersion–forgiveness*. Pressing questions thus arise: How exactly is baptism related to repentance (for example, does one have to repent before, simultaneously, or perhaps only after baptism)? And how do repentance and baptism pave the way for forgiveness?

### *John's Baptism Does Not Involve Purification*

Scholars usually refer to the baptism of John as a purification ritual, comparable to the Qumranic rites. I would like to show that John's concept of immersion is not based on purification, but on a more symbolic role of washing in water.

The consensus is that "John's baptism . . . shared with all the Jewish practices the features of purification or cleansing."<sup>43</sup> According to Taylor, "the inner cleansing precedes the outer cleansing," but before one gets rid of bodily impurity, repentance and righteous acts should come first.<sup>44</sup> Webb concluded that John's baptism "did have a purificatory function." Although he noted that it does involve a "moral cleansing of sin," he added that "in Judaism immersions are related to purification."<sup>45</sup> Also Klawans, who distinguished between ritual

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<sup>41</sup> Acts 1:5; 11:16; 13:24; 18:25–26; 19:1–7; H. Lictheberger, "Täufergemeinden und frühchristliche Täuferpolitik im letzten Drittel des 1. Jahrhunderts," *ZThK* 84 (1987): 36–57; F. Avemarie, *Die Täuferzählungen der Apostelgeschichte: Theologie und Geschichte* (WUNT 139; Tübingen: Mohr, 2002), 30–35 (31).

<sup>42</sup> For the historicity of Mark and Luke since they lack the christological imprint, see Web, *John the Baptizer*, 171–74; J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew. Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume Two: Mentor, Message and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 53–54. Webb also noted that granting John the authority of forgiveness which is exclusive to Jesus is unusual and pointed to the authenticity of the descriptions in the gospels.

<sup>43</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 88.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor, *The Immerser*, 32, 57, 81, 92–100. She explains the lack of reference to ritual impurity in the NT, arguing that the gospels' Gentile audience was not interested in ritual purity, hence she focused on Josephus (*ibid.*, 81).

<sup>45</sup> Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 194–95.

and moral impurity, states that “John’s baptism appears to be a ritual of moral purification.”<sup>46</sup>

Nonetheless, it should be stressed, none of the references to the baptism of John in the gospels and Acts mention purity or purification!<sup>47</sup> The above mentioned opinions were most probably influenced by Josephus.

Josephus (*Ant.* 18:117) argued for the necessary preconditions of righteousness and justice before the person may “join in baptism.”<sup>48</sup> Josephus stressed this initial stage further, insisting that “they must not employ it [namely, baptism] to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed, but as a consecration (*ἀγνεία*) of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly *cleansed* (*προεκκεκαθαυμένης*) by right behavior.” Brownlee and Flusser accepted the authenticity of Josephus’ report, based on the parallel linkage between bodily cleansing in water and preliminary moral behavior in 1QS 3:3–12 (see above), where purification relates to both bodily defilement *and* the remission of sins.<sup>49</sup> But the Qumranic parallel does not prove that this was indeed John’s view.

Josephus’ detailed presentation of the subject is suspicious. While the gospels and Acts stress that John’s baptism is closely linked to repentance, and Mark and Luke insist that it aims at forgiveness of sins, Josephus limited the

<sup>46</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 139. Yet, he discerns that no ritual purification from moral defilement is involved (*ibid.*, 140–41).

<sup>47</sup> John 3:25 refers to a controversy between the Baptist’s followers and a certain Pharisee “about purification.” This, however, does not mean that John’s *baptism* pertains to purity. See E. Haenchen, *John 1* (Hermenia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 210. It is equally reasonable that the Pharisees criticized the Baptist for immersing while *neglecting* purification. Note that the gospels and Acts do relate to purity concerns in many other instances (e.g., Mark 1:44; 7:1–23; Luke 11:37–40; John 13:10–11; 15:3; Acts 10:11–15, 28). John’s diet of locust and honey (Mark 1:6) may also indicate purity restrictions on consuming other people’s food which was suspected as being defiled.

<sup>48</sup> The authenticity of *Ant.* 18:116–18 is largely accepted among scholars, e.g., J. P. Meier, “John the Baptist in Josephus: Philology and Exegesis,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 225–37, here 225–27. However, recently Rothschild surveyed the scholarship and argued that this cannot be proven, although a Christian interpolation also cannot be demonstrated. See C. K. Rothschild, “‘Echoes of a Whisper’: The Uncertain Authenticity of Josephus’ Witness to John the Baptist,” *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism*, 255–80.

<sup>49</sup> Brownlee, “John the Baptist,” 40 (note that he was aware of the difference between Josephus and the gospels); Flusser, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Pre-Pauline Christianity,” 50–51. In fact 1QS 5:13–14 (discussed above) is a closer parallel, since here only morality serves as a condition for ritual purity.

significance of John's "washings" to bodily purity,<sup>50</sup> similar to the bathings (*ἀγνείαν*) of the Essenes and Bannus, Josephus' mentor (*War* 2.129, 138, 159; *Ant.* 18.19; *Life* 11). Lichtenberger already suggested that Josephus wanted to portray John as an Essene or somehow similar to Bannus.<sup>51</sup> Josephus repeated three times in *Ant.* 18.117 that morality is a precondition for baptism or purity, and added that it is not the baptism that atones for sin, but only moral behavior. It therefore seems that some of his potential readers thought otherwise and needed persuasion. I suggest that Josephus displays a certain bias *against* the view that "immersion of repentance" does indeed lead to pardon, as we already deduced from the various NT statements on baptism!

Josephus' description is also doubtful since he decreases the role of John and the uniqueness of his baptism. Meier already regarded Josephus' description as unintelligible, since "John is reduced to a popular moral philosopher in the Greco-Roman mode, with a slight hint of a neo-Pythagorean performing ritual lustration."<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, both Josephus and the gospels designate John as "the Baptist" or "the baptizer."<sup>53</sup> This means that he himself immersed the person baptized, making this an unusual rite. There is indeed evidence that he administered the baptism by himself (Mark 1:5), and he is cited declaring, "I baptize . . ." (Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). In the gospels and Acts baptism is a ritual, and John's own role in it is essential. Others, Bannus included, did not administer the immersion of their followers. Being immersed *by John*, therefore, carried a special symbolism.<sup>54</sup> He was "an agent of immersion."<sup>55</sup>

In contrast, Josephus credits the *behavior* of those baptized by John with substantial weight, reducing John's own role to a general call for repentance (cf. Luke 1:15–17). Josephus does not mention John's explicit and direct involvement in the act of baptism in water, presenting it as conventional

<sup>50</sup> Meier, "John the Baptist in Josephus," 231, noted this contrast to Mark 1:4//Luke 3:3, and suggested that Josephus was reacting to claims by John's followers.

<sup>51</sup> H. Lichtenberger, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and John the Baptist: Reflections on Josephus' Account of John the Baptist," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Forty Years of Research*, ed. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport (Leiden: Magnes and Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1992), 340–46. Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 192, also concluded that Josephus' dissociation of forgiveness from baptism is not accurate, since this means that repentance is also separated from baptism.

<sup>52</sup> Meier, "John the Baptist in Josephus," 234. Cf. also C. M. Murphy, *John the Baptist: Prophet of Purity for a New Age* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>53</sup> See the references in Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 163–64 n. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 180–81.

<sup>55</sup> Taylor, *The Immerser*, 50, 85–86.

washing/purification.<sup>56</sup> If Josephus was correct, John would hardly be called Baptist or Baptizer, and would simply be remembered as a preacher of repentance.

*The Symbolism of John the Baptist's Immersion in Water*

I contend that in the NT, the baptism of John was *not* a rite of purification but was a ritual of atonement (yet this does not mean that it had no connection whatsoever to purity, see below). I also conclude that the gospels, as opposed to Josephus, more authentically represent John's theology of baptism. But why was immersion necessary at all? And why did it play such a major role in this rite?

The Qumranic purification liturgies demonstrate how immersion operates as a catalyst for repentance, as a means for forgiveness of sins, and as a ritual that leads to atonement. Still, the immersion/purification could not produce atonement by itself. Rather, in Qumran, the *experience* of purification along with the deep *remorse* created the sense of forgiveness in the mind of the person immersed. I suggest looking at John's baptism in the same vein—although with the omission of the concept of purification: Repentance and immersion in water create a *ritual* which, due to the supervision of John as a holy man, produces a similar *religious experience* whereby one feels that his or her sins are forgiven.<sup>57</sup>

Common to both rites of atonement is the symbolism of water as reflecting moral or spiritual transformation. One steps out of the water more righteous than one entered it. However, it is not the water that made this transformation, but the person's own decision to change or improve his/her behavior. The immersion in water—especially when John was directing and watching it—was a *rite of passage* from an immoral to a moral state, in which the teachings of the *Yahad* or the Baptist were internalized. Immersion in water—with or without purification—was a ritual which symbolized a moral transformation, and made it feel real. Repentance was a precondition for forgiveness and atonement, which were only possible through purification

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<sup>56</sup> See also Lichtenberger, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and John the Baptist," 343.

<sup>57</sup> According to Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 184–91, the act of baptism expresses repentance simultaneously with immersion. Baptism not only symbolized forgiveness but actually *mediated* forgiveness as a requirement. See also Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.55: "The baptism of John mediates to the repentant person the firm promise of the remission of sins—at the coming judgment."

(Qumran) or immersion (John), and in both cases, only the water ritual would make the repentance sincere and effective.

*Washing and Purity as a Metaphor for Atonement*

The concept of moral purification in ancient Judaism builds on the symbolic meaning of purification in water.<sup>58</sup> In its figurative sense, cleansing in water reflects release from sin as if it was a bodily impurity.<sup>59</sup> Ezek 36:25, for example, pronounced, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness” (the following verses promise restoration and redemption). Here, contact with water symbolizes religious transformation, without an actual *act* of bodily purification.

The call for moral purification is also attested to in the NT texts.<sup>60</sup> Yet, in several cases, NT authors used water symbolism in a somewhat similar sense to purity or sanctity, but without referring to purification.<sup>61</sup> In the ritual of baptism, I suggest, John drew on this *association* of immersion in water as an act of purification, but did not baptize to purify the immersed person from defilement. John used the act of immersion as a rite of spiritual transformation, in which ablution in water was symbolic. John the Baptist could rely on the Jewish use of washing/immersing in water as a symbol for atonement without necessarily being influenced by the Qumranic purification rites.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> In SibOr 4.165, repentance is followed by the exhortation “wash your whole bodies in perennial rivers” and “stretch out your hands to heaven and ask forgiveness for your previous deeds.”

<sup>59</sup> E.g., Pss 26:6; 51:7; Philo. Spec. 1.259–60 (on purified mind, see *ibid.*, 119, 269); Lawrence, *Washing in Water*, 35–38, 64–70. Cf. See also Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 26–36 on the concept of moral impurity and the metaphoric sense of impurity. Josephus used the verb “to immerse” (βαπτίζω) metaphorically in *War* 2.476; 4.137; *Ant.* 10.169.

<sup>60</sup> E. Regev, “Moral Impurity and the Temple in Early Christianity in Light of Qumranic Ideology and Ancient Greek Practice,” *HTR* 79.4 (2004): 283–311.

<sup>61</sup> For example, in John 3:5 water symbolizes the Holy Spirit, hence Jesus. See also Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet in John 13:4–13; L. P. Jones, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. the search for the origins and influences in A. Yarbro Collins, “The Origins of Christian Baptism,” in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. M. E. Johnson (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 35–57 (38–47). For the concepts of symbol and metaphor see notes 90–91 below.

### The Diminishing Role of Repentance in Early Christian Baptism

In some NT texts, repentance and moral transformation continue to play an important role. In others, however, there is little or no concern for the moral behavior of the baptized person. Instead, there is greater emphasis on faith in Christ and its soteriological implications. The following discussion is based on typology rather than chronology of NT texts on baptism.

#### *The Acts of the Apostles: Repentance and Atonement in the Name of Jesus*

Acts 2:38 attributed to Peter a baptism outline very similar to John's in Mark and Luke: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Here baptism includes: *repentance-immersion-forgiveness*.<sup>63</sup> Baptism functions as a release from sin, as long as one is baptized "in the name of Jesus"—in order that one would belong to/for the sake of Jesus.<sup>64</sup> A similar outline is attributed to Paul in Acts 22:16: "be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

One may suppose that the tradition attributed to Peter is deeply influenced by the baptism of John.<sup>65</sup> Yet, in Acts 2:38 the rite of baptism is "in the name of Christ" (and also results in achieving the Holy Spirit). In a sense, putting one's faith in Christ while baptizing takes the place of John as the mediating authority of the repentance-forgiveness process.

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<sup>63</sup> For the similarities between Acts 2:28 and 1QS 3:6–12, see B. E. Thiering, "Qumran Initiation and New Testament Baptism," *NTS* 27 (1981): 615–31. That baptism promised forgiveness in Acts, see Avemarie, *Taufezählungen*, 104–28. For repentance and purification from sin, see 1 John 1:7–9. The scope of this article does not allow a discussion of the Holy Spirit in Acts' doctrine of baptism (also attested to in 1QS 3:6; 4:21), discussed by Avemarie, *Taufezählungen*, 129–75.

<sup>64</sup> See also Acts 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Did 9:5. Cf. Matt 28:19; Did 7:1, 3. L. Hartman, "Into the Name of the Lord Jesus": *Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 37–50 (45), concluded that it "referred to the authority behind the rite and made the formula meaningful."

<sup>65</sup> J. B. Green, "From 'John's Baptism to Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus': The Significance of Baptism in Luke-Acts," in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White*, ed. S. E. Porter and A. R. Cross (JSNTSup 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 156–72. On the question of whether there is a continuation between the baptism of John and baptism by Jesus' disciples, see C. S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 175–76.



The four components of Peter's baptism—repentance, Jesus' name/authority, forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Spirit—are stressed elsewhere in Acts and closely linked to Lukan theology. The call for repentance to reach forgiveness is a major theme in Luke-Acts.<sup>66</sup> The Holy Spirit is mentioned in relation to baptism in the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:47; 11:15–17), where it actually precedes his baptism. Acts 19:1–7 emphasizes that unlike John's baptism, the baptism in the name of Jesus results with the Holy Spirit.<sup>67</sup> And the belief in Christ grants forgiveness in Acts 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; and 26:18 (cf. Luke 24:47). It is difficult to determine whether Acts 2:38 reflects an earlier source influencing Luke and forming the basic core of Lukan theology<sup>68</sup> or was shaped by Lukan theological premises.

*Hebrews, 1 Peter, and Titus: Does Baptism Require Righteousness?*

The role of repentance in baptism (and presumably also the subsequent forgiveness of sins due to faith in Christ) is reduced but still implicit in several NT passages. Heb 10:22 describes entering “the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus”: “let us approach with a *true heart* in full assurance of faith, with our *hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience* and our bodies washed with pure water.”<sup>69</sup> Moral behavior is hinted at in 1 Pet 3:21: “and baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a *good conscience*, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” In these passages a true heart and/or a clean/good conscience are necessary to perform baptism. But unlike Acts 2:38 and 22:16, in Hebrews and 1 Peter, repentance is not defined as a *precondition* for baptism. Perhaps it is assumed that faith in Christ involves righteous behavior, and the question to what measure repentance is *necessary* remains open.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Luke 18:13; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 26:18; and esp. Luke 24:47; G. D. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2002). Repentance naturally leads to forgiveness in Luke 1:77; 11:4; Acts 5:31.

<sup>67</sup> M. Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 378–87.

<sup>68</sup> Avemarie, *Taufersählungen*, 177–213.

<sup>69</sup> That the passage refers to baptism, see C. R. Koester, *Hebrews* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 311. Possible connection between baptism and “repentance from dead works” may be found in Heb 6:1–2. Note the moral stringency of repentance in Heb 6:4–6; 10:26.

<sup>70</sup> In 1 John 1:7–9, in contrast, confession of sins is mentioned in relation to “purification from sin,” which may also imply baptism. Did 7 requires fasting prior to baptism, but

Curiously, Titus 3:5 overtly denies such a linkage between prior moral behavior and salvation/Holy Spirit: “He saved us, *not because of any works of righteousness that we had done*, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” For Titus, believers are saved not because of their morality,<sup>71</sup> but due to their union with Christ. Perhaps the author was concerned that demanding repentance as a precondition for forgiveness/atonement might lead to questioning Christ’s credibility for justifying the believer,<sup>72</sup> which in a sense competes with true faith in Christ (although this does not mean that one should not act righteously).

### *Paul’s Baptism, Christology and the Disposal of Sin*

Paul refers to baptism several times, but does not *describe* the ritual practice itself (although he mentions the rite in 1 Cor 1:13–17). Paul never mentions repentance or moral demands in relation to baptism. Rather, he stresses the notion of baptism *into* Christ: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ (εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε) have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:27).<sup>73</sup> This term sparked controversy: Dunn argued that Paul does not refer at all to the rite of physical baptism in water, but represents the metaphorical sense of the spiritual experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit; others disagreed.<sup>74</sup>

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does not mention repentance in this context. Justin, in *First Apology* 61, mentioned “fasting for the remission of sins” before baptism. For some apostolic fathers, repentance is not a condition for baptism, but rather the *result* of baptism. Cf. the gift of repentance and remission of sins in Barn 16:8–9.

<sup>71</sup> On the contrast between “upright deeds” (obedience to God’s commands in their sense in the Hebrew Bible/LXX) and faith, see J. D. Quinn, *The Letter to Titus* (AB 35; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 193, 210–13, 216.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 215–16.

<sup>73</sup> For the view that Paul introduces baptism as an initiation rite, see J. Louis Martin, *Galatians* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 375–76.

<sup>74</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (second ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2010 [1970]), here 109–13. On the debate between Dunn and others on whether baptism in the spirit should be different from baptism in water (as a different concept or even a different event), see A. R. Cross, “Spirit- and Water-Baptism in 1 Corinthians 12:13,” in *Dimension of Baptism. Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. S. Porter and A. R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 120–48. For the sake of my argument, if Paul indeed refers here solely to baptism in the Holy Spirit, he builds on the metaphor of baptism in water, discussed below. Note that the deutero-Pauline Col 2:12–13 also stresses the atoning function of baptism in

In 1 Cor 6:11–12, Paul relates to baptism as a rite of union with Christ which leads to justification and the Holy Spirit, leaving repentance unmentioned. Yet, the context of lawsuits within the community and grave moral sins (1 Cor 6:1–10) seems to indicate that Paul thinks that such baptism cleanses one’s sins.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in Rom 6:3–4, Paul speaks of baptism “into Christ,” as rebirth and union with Christ in the context of release from sin (vss. 1, 6–14).<sup>76</sup> Thus, for Paul, baptism is “participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, with the tremendous significance that involves a new life in the Holy Spirit. . . . The death of the baptized is death *to sin* and . . . life *in God* . . . [and] triumph over all powers of sin.”<sup>77</sup>

This concept of baptism is far removed from those of John the Baptist and Acts. Water (whether actual physical immersion or merely as the symbol of baptism) and belief in Christ result in atonement, but repentance and morality are not mandatory before baptism.<sup>78</sup> As in Heb 10:23, 1 Pet 3:21, and Titus 3:5, for Paul it is faith in Christ that leads to forgiveness, sanctification, or salvation.

### **Washing in Water as an Early Christian Symbol of Baptism**

What exactly does baptism *in water* mean? How does it lead to atonement? In what sense is it similar to a purification rite? In this section I will examine the *symbolic* meaning of immersion in water among the various types of baptism in the NT. I will also discuss whether purity language was used only in a figurative

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Christ: “when you were buried with him in baptism. . . . And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses.”

<sup>75</sup> Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 121, argued that the passage pertains to spiritual cleansing of the heart and conscience (related to the preceding list of vices) rather than bodily washing. Nonetheless, he added: “it may be implied that water baptism was the occasion when this cleansing took place.”

<sup>76</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38A; Texas: Word, 1988), 311–13, acknowledged that Paul had water baptism in mind as a model for the spiritual one, as well as in Col 2:12 (for the latter, see *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 156).

<sup>77</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 286. See also Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 156.

<sup>78</sup> See O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 14–15: “a new relation is formed between the external act of βαπτίζειν and the forgiveness of sins. It is no longer merely the bath, the washing away, that purifies, but the immersion [namely, in Christ] as such.” “The forgiveness of sins . . . is now based on the redemptive death of Christ. . . . [I]t is Christ that operates, while the person baptised is the passive object of his deed.”

sense (that is, as a metaphor) for a spiritual experience, without applying to actual bodily purification.

*Washing in Water—a Symbol for Spiritual Transformation*

The role or meaning of immersion in water is neglected in many NT references to baptism. While the physical act of baptism in water is mentioned in several texts,<sup>79</sup> discussions of baptism in Paul's letters and other NT texts skip this practical aspect and focus on the spiritual or symbolic aspects of the rite.<sup>80</sup> Explicit allusion to purity—such as in Acts 22:16—is lacking in Acts 2:38; 8:12–13; 8:38–39; 10:47; 16:33; 19:5,<sup>81</sup> as well as in Did 7 (and we have seen that purity is not mentioned in relation to John the Baptist in the gospels and Acts). Also, in Rom 6:3–4 and Gal 3:27 there is reference to neither purity nor water. Here, it seems, baptism lost its literal meaning as immersion in water and became a theological term for “conversion-initiation.” One may infer that baptism “in the name of Christ” (Acts) or “in Christ” (Paul) provided sufficient religious symbolism of excitement and spiritual transformation, therefore drawing on the theme of water or purification was unnecessary.

Nonetheless, elsewhere Paul did relate to purity. In 1 Cor 6:11 Paul referred specifically to washing in water (but not to purification) as an act of sanctification in the name of Christ and the Holy Spirit: “*you were washed (ἀπελούσασθε)* you were sanctified (ἡγιάσθητε) you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

Dunn noted that “the language of purification has left behind the cultic sphere of ritual purity and speaks rather of the inward or spiritual cleaning.”<sup>82</sup> He argued that for Paul, baptism in the spirit takes the place of John's baptism in water: “baptism was in some sense the medium through which God brought the baptizand into participation in Christ's death and burial.”<sup>83</sup> Yet, the concept of

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<sup>79</sup> Acts 8:38–39. For explicit later evidence, see Did 7; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 21.

<sup>80</sup> 1 Cor 1:13–17; 10:2; 12:13; 15:29; Eph 4:5.

<sup>81</sup> Acts does show awareness to purity and necessitates purification elsewhere: Acts 21:24, 26; cf. 10: 28; 11:3.

<sup>82</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, “Baptized’ as Metaphor,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church*, 294–310 (here 300). Newton, *The Concept of Purity*, 81–84, nonetheless reads here an actual purification, though only from moral impurity.

<sup>83</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 450–52.

“baptism” (and a metaphor of death in 1 Cor 12:1) had already been quite removed in conception from the actual performance of baptism in water.<sup>84</sup>

Curiously, similar washing imagery (and at times even purification) is found in other later NT texts. The author of Eph 5:26 described the essence of baptism, adding more explicit purity language of cleansing: “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy *by cleansing her with the washing of water* (ἀγίαση καθάρσας τῷ λουτρῷ) by the word.”<sup>85</sup> Here sanctification is visualized as purification, implying that baptism functions analogously to ritual purity. Heb 10:22 portrays baptism “in Jesus’ blood” as both sprinkling and washing in water: “let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts *sprinkled clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies *washed with pure water* (λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ). Baptism relates here to both bodily and moral purification, similar to the Qumranic purification liturgies.<sup>86</sup>

An opposite approach, which denies the relationship between baptism and purity, is found in 1 Pet 3:21: “and baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a *removal of dirt from the body* (σαρκὸς ἀπόθεις ῥύπου) but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The author makes clear that baptism has nothing to do with purification.<sup>87</sup> Obviously, some Christians tended to think otherwise and needed such clarification.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 457 and 452, respectively. Dunn explains the figurative reasoning of this metaphor of death/burial as the experience of “sinking below the surface of the water of baptism in immersion” or as “the moment and context in which it all came together,” also pointing to Mark 10:38–39 (ibid., 451–52).

<sup>85</sup> That the author actually refers to baptism, see E. Best, *Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 542–43. See also 1 Pet 1:22.

<sup>86</sup> On physical washing here, see Koester, *Hebrews*, 445, 449 According to H. Attridge, *Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 288–89, the sprinkling of the heart is metaphorically cleansing the conscience of sin, and the “clean water” derived from Ezek 36:25. Cf. Heb 9:14; S. Byrskog, “Baptism in the Letter to the Hebrews,” in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism*, 1.587–604 (596–97).

<sup>87</sup> On this rejection of Jewish customary bodily purification, see J. H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 679: “baptism is not an action affecting the external condition of one’s body. The point of the contrast lies in the antithesis between an *external cleansing* of one’s body and an *internal pledge* of one’s commitment to God. . . . Christian baptism differs markedly from ritual ablutions. . . .” See also P. J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 267: “The power of baptism to save is

Interestingly, Titus 3:5 does use water imagery. Yet, one may suspect that this is not conventional bodily purification; rather, it is a substantial spiritual transformation: “He saved us . . . because of his own mercy, saved us through a *washing* (διὰ λουτροῦ) of regeneration and of renewal from the Holy Spirit.”<sup>88</sup> The stress here is on the religious meaning of baptism in the Holy Spirit: washing is used as a symbol, implying that in baptism the experience is comparable to that of moving from uncleanness to purity through immersion in water.

The washing or purity language in 1 Cor 6:11, Eph 5:26, and Titus 3:5 uses washing/cleansing as an act of sanctification in the Spirit (1 Cor and Titus), or Jesus’ Word (Eph). In Hebrews, bodily purity is addressed, but it is explicitly denied in 1 Peter.

1 Cor 6:11 and Eph 5:26 do not stress the plain act of baptism at conversion-initiation, but the spiritual aspects of release from sin and sanctification. According to Dunn, 1 Cor 6:11 does not pertain to the actual rite of immersion in water,<sup>89</sup> hence washing or cleansing in these passages has no physical or bodily meaning. Rather, it seems, when these authors refer to washing or cleansing, they use it only to elucidate a spiritual experience, a consecration by Christ. Washing is a symbol that makes clear what has changed with the acceptance of Christ, and not necessarily due to physical baptism in water. If this understanding is embraced, bodily purity language is employed in 1 Cor 6:11, Eph 5:26, and Heb 10:22 as a metaphor for a spiritual phenomenon.

This metaphor juxtaposes two distinct domains, source (familiar) and target (abstract and mental), transforming meaning or experience from the source to the target, thus creating a new understanding of the target domain. It carries notions from one cognitive or conceptual domain to another, providing

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drawn not from the water in some mysterious way but rather from the resurrection of Christ. . . .” Achtemeier, *ibid.*, 268–69, suggested that “filth of the flesh” refers to the moral sense of impurity, hence “our author divorced such cleansing from moral impurity from the rite of baptism.”

<sup>88</sup> Translation follows Quinn, *The Letter to Titus*, 187, 194, 218–20, who also noted the complex relationship between baptism, washing, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ blood, water, and the Holy Spirit are linked together in 1 John 5:6–8.

<sup>89</sup> Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*. See already Cullmann, *Baptism*, 47: “baptism involves two things: . . . what happens at the moment when the baptismal action takes place; and . . . what results from baptism, is determined by it, and extends through the whole life of the person baptised.” Also, for Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 262, the saving event is not immersion in water but meeting Christ.

the latter with a new impetus, a different understanding, and a change of meaning.<sup>90</sup>

However, if one disagrees with Dunn and insists that these authors did refer to actual baptism in water, and that some of them did employ the physical, bodily, and plain meaning of purity cleansing of the body, what we have here is not purity as a metaphor for a spiritual transformation in baptism. Rather, purity becomes a symbol. That is, it is used both as a signifier for something else (spiritual) but at the same time retains its original bodily meaning, thus simultaneously representing two related meanings.<sup>91</sup>

Strangely, washing and purity language were stressed in these particular texts, whereas in descriptions of John's baptism and in Acts the role of washing and cleansing was minimal. I suggest that the washing and cleansing imagery was unnecessary as long as actual immersion was carried out. When baptism "in the Holy Spirit" became a theological concept somewhat detached from a rite involving immersion in water (again, if one follows Dunn), the metaphor of cleansing or purification was required to make sense of it. Words took the place of action.

### *Baptism, Washing, and Ritual Symbol*

Washing in water in its non-bodily sense carried a symbolic meaning which is actually applied to the human spirit, based on a ritual symbol. To recall, the Qumranic purification liturgies use the ritual act of bodily purification to provide a ritual experience of atonement. In Qumran, purification rituals accompanied the rite of repentance and attaining atonement. It is easier to visualize the elimination

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<sup>90</sup> N. Quinn, "The Cultural Basis of Metaphor," in *Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology*, ed. J. W. Fernandez (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 56–93. For the use of conceptual metaphor for understanding the concept of impurity, see T. Kazen, "The Role of Disgust in Priestly Purity Law," *Journal of Law, Religion and State* 3.1 (2014): 62–92 and the bibliography cited there. For Paul's use of metaphors to make sense of the ideas of atonement and the Holy Spirit, see S. Finlan, *The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004); E. Kosmo, *The Pauline Metaphors of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

<sup>91</sup> A symbol has its own initial meaning in addition to something else that it stands for. Cf. U. Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), 130–63. In symbolic signification, a single movement transfers from one level of meaning to the other, in which the primary signification gives meaning to the secondary signification. See P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 55.

of sin and the transformation of the soul when water is involved, in analogy to the purification of bodily filth. The symbolic use of washing in water in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Titus, and Hebrews aimed to achieve a somewhat similar sense of atonement as a means for salvation in Christ.<sup>92</sup> Washing was a familiar concept that was adjoined to a spiritual claim of faith in and salvation by Christ to make this transformation clearer. This leads us to discuss how baptism was transformed from ritual to a symbol of immersion in water.

Paul and the authors of Ephesians and Titus discuss baptism without actually describing the rite. For them, the ritual/concept of baptism in Christ/the Holy Spirit was grasped *like* an act of washing (and at times also cleansing) in water because the immersion symbolizes, using water as a *symbol*, a transformation, a *rite de passage*, from life without Christ to union with Christ. This symbol, which sought to make sense of a complex spiritual experience of faith, was based on the *model* of the washing of the body. It was a *symbol* of the human body (and again, if one follows Dunn that baptism in the Holy Spirit became a religious concept and not an actual washing, we may identify it as a *metaphor* for washing in water which was applied to one's consciousness).

Why did these NT authors draw on the symbol of washing in water for spiritual transformation? It seems that they have continued a tradition which began with John the Baptist. As we have already seen, John's baptism built on the biblical symbolism of purification in water as a metaphor for atonement. When baptism became customary among the early Christians, this symbolism became standardized as a *ritual symbol*. The actual ritual of baptism in water was reduced to a symbol (or even a metaphor) of washing in water. Washing lost at least some of its plain bodily meaning and signified a spiritual process which was difficult to express in words.<sup>93</sup> To better understand the symbolic (and following Dunn, even metaphoric) meaning of baptism as bodily ritual, we shall now turn to the relationship between metaphor and ritual.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors are not merely literary, but can also guide or involve actions.<sup>94</sup> Religious rituals are metaphorical, and

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<sup>92</sup> Note Paul's use of bodily metaphors, such as when the body of the believer takes part in Christ (1 Cor 6:15; Rom 12:1). Cf. D. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>93</sup> If one would reject Dunn and insist that the above texts do refer to the physical acts of immersion in water and bodily cleansing, then I would argue that this was *accompanied* by the new spiritual sense of ritual symbolism.

<sup>94</sup> G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 156–58.



the ritual itself preserves cultural metaphors.<sup>95</sup> This view is also maintained by cultural anthropologists. Metaphors are translated into actions and become realized by behavior, mainly through the ritual performance guided by these metaphors.<sup>96</sup> A ritual is therefore a series of metaphors put into operation by ceremonial rites. The Eucharist, for example, is an organizing metaphor: becoming the body of Christ requires a ceremonial act.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, anthropological research has shown a growing awareness of the role of the body as a means of expression.<sup>98</sup> Although metaphors are a matter of thought, *embodied metaphors* can be generated and experienced by the body.<sup>99</sup>

Following the model of ritual metaphor and the example of Qumranic purification liturgies, I would like to suggest how the concept of baptism operated, whether as a symbol or a metaphor. In both the baptism of John and early Christian baptism in Acts, the *ritual* of physical immersion in water (but not purification) represented a spiritual transformation involving forgiveness, atonement, and/or attainment of the Holy Spirit. The person immersed in water felt that his or her spirit had been washed/cleansed with water. The body became a representative of the spirit. The natural imagery of washing the body became a model for the “washing” of the person’s spirit.

The use of the symbol or metaphor of washing in water as a spiritual transformation became complex: first there was the biblical metaphor of cleansing from sin (Ezek 36:25 and n. 59 above); then John and the early Christians based on it a ritual act of baptism/immersion; finally, if we follow Dunn, Paul and others drew on the symbol as used in the rite of baptism, transforming washing in water from a ritual act to a mere religious spiritual concept.

In comparison, in Qumranic purification liturgies, the immersion took the symbolism one stage back: immersion not only accompanied repentance and

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>96</sup> J. W. Fernandez, *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 21–23, 41–50. Cf. V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors. Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974).

<sup>97</sup> Fernandez, *Persuasions and Performances*, 43.

<sup>98</sup> T. J. Csordas, “Introduction: the Body as Representation and Being in the World,” in *Embodiment and Experience. The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, ed. T. J. Csordas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–24.

<sup>99</sup> S. M. Low, “Embodied Metaphors: Nerves as *Lived Experience*,” in *Embodiment and Experience*, 139–162 (143).

atonement (and perhaps even “cleansed” one’s spirit), but also transformed the body to a state of ritual purity. In Qumran, the basis of the metaphor of cleansing/purification was realized as a rite of bodily cleansing, while at the same time the non-bodily or spiritual symbol of washing-atonement was developed.

### Washing in Water—Development of a Concept

**Ezek 36:25:** literary metaphor—release from sin

**Qumran:** realization of the metaphor: ritual of bodily purification *and* release from sin

**John the Baptist and Acts:** act of immersion as a *ritual symbol*—release from sin

### Conclusions: The Variety of Baptismal Forms in Early Christianity

Baptism was far from being a monolithic and fixed rite and concept in early Christianity. We have seen several different ways in which immersion in water was used or perceived as a means for achieving atonement or salvation. The relationship between washing in water, repentance, and salvation was grasped in several different ways in the NT texts. Different writers or groups stressed, ignored, or even rejected some of these components.

Our analysis shows that immersion served as a true purification rite only in Qumran. The Qumran sectarians, John the Baptist (in the gospels), and Acts 2:38 demanded prior repentance as a condition for forgiveness of sins, while other NT texts, including the Pauline letters, reduced its importance or omitted the need for repentance, and Titus even denied it altogether. Paul and the author of Titus developed certain christological conceptions of death and rebirth with Christ, which seem to take the place of the need to repent for one’s sins. For them, baptism centered on the experience of the union with Christ, and did not involve a moral transformation of one’s behavior.

Common to all these forms of immersion and baptism is the symbolic relationship between washing in water and atonement or salvation. The Qumranic purification liturgies elucidate the manner in which immersion in water carries a sense of spiritual transformation and leads the immersed person through an experience of atonement. The ritual symbol of purity/washing, whether physical (Qumran) or symbolic/metaphorical (NT), represents a bodily change of status which affects the soul directly, when the person immersed experiences a sort of sanctification. In the NT, baptism lost the aspect of bodily

purification. Yet, immersion in water—either as an actual rite or abstract concept—carried a deep symbolic meaning. It functioned as what Victor Turner called a *dominant symbol*: a condensed symbol which unites disparate meanings in a single symbolic formation, and has a polarized meaning.<sup>100</sup>

Early Christian baptism accomplished a goal somewhat similar to that of the Qumranic purification liturgies. It was a rite of conversion and of moral transformation. It was perceived as the ritual entry to Christianity as well as a metaphoric expression of the christological doctrine of dying and being with Christ. But baptism was not all of these things at the very same time. Some Christians stressed the moral transformation and forgiveness of sins, while others focused on the religious transformation of being with Christ (as an analogy for this variety, one may compare the different conceptions of the role of faith vs. deeds as leading to righteousness in Gal 3:1–14 and Jas 2:14–26). However, it is difficult to reconstruct a chronological development of these different conceptions of baptism. Perhaps future research will shed further light on the historical and religious background that shaped the variety of baptismal forms.

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<sup>100</sup> V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1967), 19–47 (30).

## The Various Outlines of Baptism in the NT

	Immer- sion	Baptismal Agency	Bodily Purity	Moral Purity	Repen- tance, Moral Demands	Type of Salvation
<b>Qumran, Purifica- tion Liturgies</b>	+	-	+	+	+	Atone- ment like sacrifice
<b>John the Baptist in Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3</b>	+	John	-	-	+	Forgive- ness of sins
<b>Acts 2:38</b>	+	In the name of Jesus	-	-	+	Forgive- ness of sins; the gift of the Holy Spirit
<b>1 Cor 6:11-12</b>	+	In the name of Jesus	Metapho- ric?	-	-	Justifica- tion and the Holy Spirit
<b>Rom 6:3-4</b>	+	Death with Christ	-	-	-	New life in Christ
<b>Col 2:12-13</b>	+	Death with Christ	-	-	-	Resurrec- tion and forgiveness of sins
<b>Heb 10:22</b>	+		+	Metapho- ric	? ( <i>True heart</i> )	
<b>1 Pet 3:21</b>	+	Christ's resurrec- tion	Rejection	-	? ( <i>Good con- science</i> )	
<b>Titus 3:5</b>	+	God's mercy	-	-	Rejection	Rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit
<b>Eph 5:26</b>	+	Christ's love and sacrifice	Metapho- ric	-	-	Sanctifica- tion