



# *The History*

# *Of Baptism*

*Quotations from church fathers and reformers revealing historical Christian belief in water baptism*

First Century. "In this century baptism was administered by immersing the candidate in water."-*Mosheim Ecclesiastical History*.

The Apostolic Age. "The ordinary mode of baptism was by immersion."-Fischer, *The History of the Christian Church*.

"In the first age of the church only adults who entered it consciously and voluntarily were baptized."-Meander, *Memorials of the Christian Life*.

"Immersion and not sprinkling was unquestionably the original, normal form. This is shown by the very meaning of the Greek words, *baptizo*, *baptisma*, *baptis-mos*, used to designate the rite."

"There were ecclesiastical laws which made persons baptized by sprinkling ineligible to office. Not until the end of the Thirteenth Century did sprinkling become the rule and immersion the exception."-Schaff, *History of Apostolic Christianity*, Vol. 1, P. 568-570.

### History of Sprinkling

"In the year 753, Astulphus, King of the Lombards, oppressed the City of Rome. Pope Stephen III fled into France .... In the spring of 754, in answer to some monks of Cressy in Brittany, who privately consulted him, he gave his opinion on nineteen questions, one of which is allowed to be the first authentic law for administering baptism by pouring, which in time was interpreted to signify sprinkling. The question proposed was whether in the case of necessity occasioned by illness of an infant it were lawful to baptize by pouring water out of the hand, or a cup, on the head of an infant. Stephen answered: 'If such a baptism were performed in case of necessity, in the name of the holy Trinity, it should be held valid.'

"The learned James Basagne makes several very proper remarks on this canon . . . as that, although it is accounted the first law for sprinkling, yet it doth not forbid dipping; that it allows sprinkling in cases of imminent danger; ... therefore that this law did not alter the mode of dipping in public baptism, and that it was not until 557 years afterwards that the legislature, in the Council at Ravenna in the year 1311 declared dipping or sprinkling indifferent.

"The answer of Stephen is the true origin of private baptism or of sprinkling."-Robinson, *History of Baptism*, Chap. 33.

The Council of Ravenna 1311 A.D. "Baptism is to be administered by either aspersion or immersion."-*Labbe and Cossart Church Councils*, Vol. 2, Book 2, 1586.

It was not till 1311 that the legislature in the council held at Ravenna, declared immersion or sprinkling to be indifferent." -*Edinburg Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, 236.

"The Council of Ravenna (1311) was the first council of the church which legalized baptism by sprinkling, by leaving it to the choice of the officiating minister."-*Encyclopedia Britannica*.

"The Council of Ravenna (1311), legalized the baptism of sprinkling by leaving to the officiating minister the two modes of applying water."-Johnson's, *Universal Cyclopaedia*.

"The Council of Ravenna (1311), was the first to allow a choice between sprinkling and immersion."-*The Schaff Herscov Cyclopaedia of Religious Literature*.

"Not until the end of the thirteenth century did sprinkling become the rule and immersion the exception."-Schaff, *History of Apostolic Christianity*, Vol. 1, P. 568-570.

"Luther sought to restore immersion but without effect."-Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Vol. 2, 250.

"Baptism is tailed in the Greek. *baptisma*, and in the Latin, *mcrsto*, that is, if one dips something entirely into water it closes over it. Although in many places the custom of dipping children into the baptismal water or of immersing them has been abandoned; and although they are only sprinkled by the hand with the baptismal water, it nevertheless should be in such a way, and would be right according to the *taufte* that the child or anyone that is being baptized, should be sunk entirely into the water and taken out again. Without a doubt *taufte* is derived from the word *tiedde*; that is, one should sink deeply into water that which is being baptized."-Luther Works (Wimered.) Vol. 2, 727.

"Whether the person to be baptized is to be wholly immersed, and that whether once or twice, .or whether

he is only to be sprinkled with water, is not of the least consequence; churches should be at liberty to adopt either according to the diversity of climate, although it is evident that the very word 'baptize,' however, signifies to immerse, and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church."-Calvin *Institutes*, Book 4, Chap. 15.

### The First Law in Europe for Infant Baptism, (789 A.D.)

"Whatever Cyprian and Augustine might intend, the one by advising and the other by ordering Christians to baptize babes ... it made no observable progress till an event fell out in the eighth century, which gave it authority and credit for its great usefulness to despotic princes.

"The Saxons, at that time pagans, inhabited a great part of Germany .... Charlemagne (742-814) was resolved either to subdue the Saxons or exterminate the whole nation .... The severe laws yet stand in the capitularies of this monarch, by which they were obliged on pain of death to be baptized or of heavy fines to baptize their children within the year of their birth .... He consulted all the learned prelates of the age, and his chief advisor was Alcuin, an Anglo-Saxon Abbot of Canterbury .... They dwelt largely on the ceremonies of baptism, particularly triune immersion 'e-Robinson, *History of Baptism*, Chap. 26.

"In this country (England) sprinkling was never declared valid, ordinary baptism until the assembly of divines in the time of Cromwell (1599-1656), influenced by Dr. Lightfoot, pronounced it so."-Robinson, *History of Baptism*, Chap. 19.

"In England even in the reign of Edward VI, triune immersion was commonly observed. But during the persecution of Mary, many persons, most of whom were Scotchmen, fled from England to Geneva, and there greedily imbibed the opinion of that church. In 1556 a book was published in that place containing, 'The Form of Prayer and Ministration of the Sacrament, approved by the famous and godly learned man, John Calvin,' in which the administrator is enjoined to take water in his hand and lay it upon the child's forehead. These Scottish exiles, returning to their own country, with Knox at their head, in 1549, established sprinkling in Scotland. From Scotland this practice made its way into England in the reign of Elizabeth, but was not authorized by the established church. At the Assembly of Divines held at Westminster in 1643, it was keenly debated whether immersion or sprinkling should be adopted; twenty-five voted for sprinkling and twenty-four for immersion; and even this small majority was attained at the earnest request of Dr. Lightfoot, who had acquired great influence in the Assembly."-*Edinburg Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, P. 236.

Mr. Calvin in his comments on Acts 8 :38, says, "We see from this distance, what was the baptismal rite among the ancients; for they plunged the whole body into the water. Now 'tis the custom for the minister to sprinkle only the body or head .... Wherefore the church did grant liberty to herself since the beginning to change the ordinances somewhat."

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, in his notes on page 220, on Romans 6:4, says: "We are buried with him (alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion) that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father; so we also, by the same power should rise again, and as he lives a new life in heaven, so we should walk in newness of life."

In John Wesley's *Journal*, dated Savannah, 1736, Feb. 21, he writes; "Mary Welch, aged eleven days, was baptized according to the custom of the first church and of the rule of the Church of England, by immersion."

Dr. W. D. Powell of Mexico, recently wrote from Athens, Greece, as follows; "I found that all the churches in Athens-s-the Presbyterian included-are compelled to immerse candidates for baptism, for, as one of the professors remarked, 'The commonest day laborer understands nothing else for *baptizo* but immersion.' I asked the professor what *baptizo* meant, and he said, 'It has but one meaning-to submerge, to immerse. Why do you ask?' " Mr. Powell adds that the Presbyterians once sprinkled some children, and created such a scandal that they were compelled to have a small baptistry made. In Greece, Bulgaria, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and wherever the Greek language is spoken, immersion for baptism is practiced."-*Christian Observer*, Louisville, Ky., Jan. 8. 1891.

### Summary

1. The best authorities agree that the only baptism of the first century of the Christian church was immersion, either triune or single.
2. The first authority for changing the form from immersion to pouring water on the person, was Pope Stephen III, 754, A.D., and that was only a permission in extreme cases.

3. The first law for infant baptism was made by the Roman emperor, Charlemagne, 789, A.D. Its object was to swell the number of nominal adherents to Christianity.

4. The Council of Ravenna, 1311 A.D., was the first church council to legalize sprinkling, yet regarding immersion as equally valid.

5. At the Assembly of Westminster Creedmakers, in 1643, twenty-four votes were cast for immersion and twenty-five for sprinkling. The one vote of Dr. Lightfoot saved the Westminster Confession of faith from being committed to immersion.

6. Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and all the great reformers admitted immersion to have been the primitive baptism. 7. All Greek speaking people and Greek scholars, know that the only proper meaning of the Greek *baptizo*, *baptizmos*, etc., is dip or immerse or submerge.

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