

Creative Waters

500 Years of Baptism,
Worship, and the Arts

Theological Groundwork

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Introduction



Baptism with water in the name of the triune God unites believers with Christ and the church. Through the Spirit, we repent and turn to God in faith and live as transformed people. Through the waters of baptism, God cleanses and renews us as we commit to following Jesus and become members of the church, the body of Christ, dying and rising to new life [1].

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Baptism is one of the most ancient and primitive of Christian practices. For many Anabaptist-Mennonites, our understanding of baptism has come through baptismal preparation classes (traditionally called “Catechism”) and other pedagogical approaches that have shaped us in an educative sense. However, **sometimes we forget that baptism is a liturgical act.** Baptism as an act of worship is multi-layered: it is visual and verbal and physical, and it’s thick with meaning.

Baptism is deeply personal *and* communal. Baptism is intimate *and* political. Baptism is physical *and* spiritual. Too often we have been misled to consider baptism as primarily cognitive or cerebral and to miss the mysterious, abundant richness to which the symbolic world opens us.



Baptism as an act of worship is multi-layered: It is visual and verbal and physical, and it’s thick with meaning.

What follows is one (and certainly not the only!) description of Anabaptist-Mennonite baptismal theology. It is rooted in scripture, attentive to liturgical practice, and grounded within a *dynamic* tradition — moving and growing, Spirit-led, and shaped in contextual ways over time. Our hope is that the liturgy and its use of the creative arts can open windows into the baptismal imagination.



Prayer for Those Preparing for Baptism

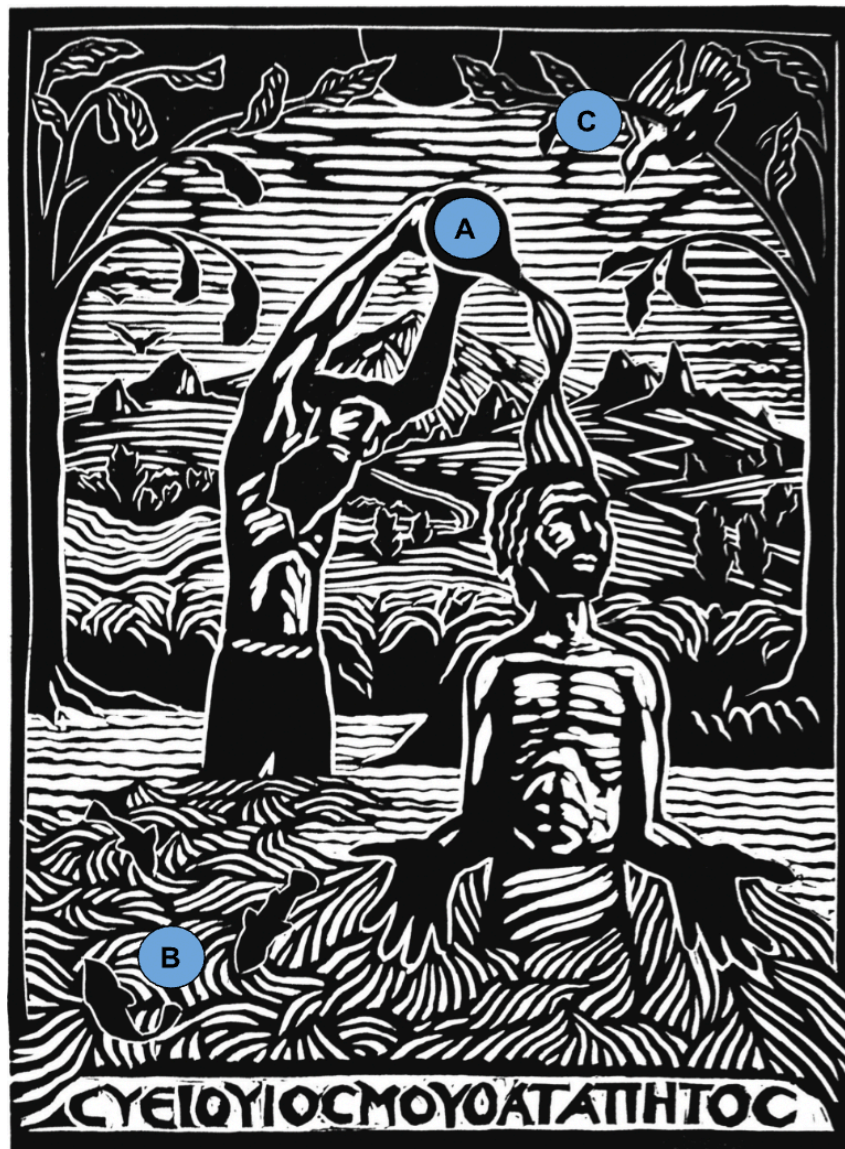
Leader: God of wanderers and seekers, we pray for those who are exploring faith and those preparing for baptism. Be with them in their questioning, in their doubting, and in their wondering. Be with them in their confidence, in their desires, and in their hopes.

People: Be with us in our common life and guide our counsel. Open us to faith as it grows in ways both familiar and new so that we may journey together as your beloved children. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who prayed that we might be one by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Shared Commitments



(Voices Together #445, *From the River to the Wilderness*, artwork by Matthew Regier, 2018. matthewregier.com)
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Matthew 3:13-17

“Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. But John would have hindered him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?’ But Jesus, answering, said to him, ‘Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed him. Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” [1].

The following shared commitments are **interrelated** and **interactive** [2].

1. **Interrelated:** It is difficult to consider one commitment in isolation from the others, and we cannot necessarily claim that one commitment is superior to another.
2. **Interactive:** We map these shared commitments on a *dynamic* piece of artwork. It moves in many different directions to encourage ongoing engagement with its myriad meanings.

A

Baptism is a tangible act that unfolds in a liturgical context and engages our whole selves.

Jesus asked John to baptize him in the Jordan River. John was an ordinary person using an ordinary thing (dirty water!) to respond to divine instruction. When we worship, we gather to recall that God meets us not just through abstract ideas, but through tangible realities that are both “ordinary” and “holy.”

B

Baptism initiates us into the Body of Christ in both local *and* universal perspective, making baptism paradigmatic for unity.

When Jesus asked John to baptize him, they entered the same river, and in the artwork above, it is difficult to see where the river ends and the background scenery begins. Is there only water in the foreground, or is there also water in the background, suggesting that Christians in other parts of the world are swimming in the same baptismal waters as us? When we are baptized, we need the help of Christians *near* us to immerse us in the waters that unite us with Christians who are *far* from us. The Body of Christ is local *and* universal, unifying followers of Jesus across time and space.

“

Reception into the Church:

Leader: **(Name), in the name of Christ and the church, I extend to you the hand of fellowship. Rise and walk in newness of life by the power that raised Christ from the dead. Abide in the Word as a disciple of Jesus and a member of the body of Christ. You belong to Christ, in whom you have been baptized.**

People: **Welcome into the body of Christ!**

(Voices Together WLE #207 ©2020 MennoMedia.)

”

C

Baptism marks the *start* of an ongoing process of discipleship, regardless of when it happens.

The dove above Jesus and God’s words (“You are my son, the beloved”) below Jesus suggest that all Persons of the Trinity acknowledge Jesus’ baptism. This is why, in almost every Christian tradition, something like “I baptize you with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” is said during a baptism. Whether someone is baptized as an infant or an adult, baptism in the name of the Triune God initiates them into the Body of Christ so that they begin a lifelong process of discipleship.

Spirit, Water, Blood

The Anabaptist tradition commonly understands baptism as including three inextricably related dimensions, namely Spirit baptism, water baptism, and baptism in blood [1]. Baptism of the Spirit focuses primarily on the work of God through the Holy Spirit, while water baptism initiates the believer into the body of Christ, the church, and provides a public witness to repentance and the stated desire to live a new life. The baptism of blood signifies a willingness to live in solidarity with Christ in attending to the struggles of life and seeking to address the suffering of the world.

Spirit

The water is ready; how can I be worthy? Yet God has invited, so I will step in. The water is waiting, and my soul is thirsty, dried out by my wand'ring, my striving, my sin [2]. (*Voices Together* #458, "The Water is Ready," words by Adam M. L. Tice, ©2019 GIA Publications, Inc.)

Water

Living water, never ending, quench the thirst and flood the soul. Wellspring, source of life eternal, drench our dryness, make us whole.

(*Voices Together* #441, "Crashing Waters at Creation," words by Sylvia G. Dunstan, ©1991 GIA Publications, Inc.)

Blood

From the waters...I will rise and walk. Wipe the water from my eyes; walk with me in Christ. (*Voices Together* #442, "From the Waters I Will Rise," words by Adam M. L. Tice, ©2011 GIA Publications, Inc.)

The image displays a musical score for the hymn "Crashing Waters at Creation" in 4/4 time, featuring a treble and bass clef. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score consists of two systems of two staves each. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a melodic line starting on G4 and a bass line starting on G2. The second system continues the melody and accompaniment, ending with a final chord in the treble clef.

(*Voices Together* #441, RESTORATION (I WILL ARISE), American traditional, harm. Charles Webb. Public domain.)

Part I: Baptism in the Spirit



Congregational Commitment at Baptism:

As we now receive you into the fellowship of the church, we make this covenant with you, and we renew our own covenant with God.

We pledge to bear each other's burdens, to assist in times of need, to share our gifts and possessions, to forgive as Christ has forgiven, to support each other in times of joy and sorrow, and in all things to work for the common good, thus proclaiming the presence of Christ among us so that our lives may glorify God.

Holy Spirit, make us one body, part of the church worldwide, united in its diversity, now and in every age. Amen.

(Voices Together WLE #208 ©2020 MennoMedia.)



Baptism begins with God's action in the life of every Christian, initiating us into the unified body of Christ, "providing a visible witness and testimony to the inner changes wrought by God" [1]. Baptism is a foundational event in the life of the Christian, a symbol of entry into the Christian community, connected to repentance and an encounter with the Holy Spirit, re-enacting the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ [2]. It is based on Christ's commandment to his disciples:



Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen. (Matthew 28:18–20).



Paul also highlights the connection of the Holy Spirit to baptism and joining the body of Christ:



Don't you know that all who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3–4).



For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all given to drink into one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12–13).



An understanding of baptism that begins with God’s action in us implies that concern for human response must not overshadow divine initiative in every aspect of salvation [3]. In other words, baptism celebrates God’s gift of loving, forgiving, and enabling grace; it is the occasion of the person being baptized and for the baptizing community to experience effectual change [4].

Receiving and embracing God’s grace in baptism enables us to recover the humanity that God first intended, because baptism draws us into the depths of God’s love, into the depths of where the Holy Spirit is re-creating and refreshing human life as God meant it to be [5].



Baptism draws us into the depths of God’s love, into the depths of where the Holy Spirit is re-creating and refreshing human life as God meant it to be.

This emphasis on God’s action by the Spirit in baptism can be traced back to historical Anabaptist sources such as the writing of Menno Simons. Menno argues that outward baptism avails nothing if we are not inwardly received, regenerated, and baptized with heavenly fire and the Holy Ghost of God. **He describes baptism as that practice “when we through the service of the Spirit, in faith, are born of God”[6].**



Prayer for the Baptized

Leader: **Faithful God, we give thanks for those who have committed their lives to you. We ask for your guidance as they journey in faith. We pray that they may be a blessing in our community and in our world. We join our hearts and voices in praise:**

People: **For your unending grace, for your example and sacrifice, for your sustaining presence, and for the gift of the newly baptized: We give you thanks, faithful God!**

(Voices Together WLE #209 ©2020 MennoMedia.)



Similarly, today’s Anabaptist confessions of faith describe baptism as “God’s gift of the Holy Spirit and the continuing work of the Spirit in the lives of believers,” focusing on that work of the Spirit in repentance, which enables us to walk in newness of life, live in community, offer Christ’s healing, witness boldly to the Gospel, and hope in the sharing of Christ’s future glory [7].

“Walk in newness of life.”

(Voices Together WLE #210 B. Romans 6:4.)

Stirring the Creative Waters

1. What resources can we engage that focus without apology on the work of the Holy Spirit and emphasize the Trinitarian reality of baptism?
2. How can we shape worship experiences in ways that recognize that “God matters?”
3. How can we emphasize the resurrection of Christ as part of the work of the Spirit in baptism?

Part II: Baptism with Water



Water Prayer

Leader: God of grace, creator of waters, your Spirit hovered over the deep.

Left/Right: We remember that you separated the land from the waters and provided rain to freshen the ground. We remember that you flooded the earth and held creatures and people above the waters. **We remember that you parted the waters as your people fled from bondage in Egypt.** We remember Jesus your Son, who, like all of us, arrived in the waters of childbirth. **We remember John baptizing in the waters of the Jordan and the Spirit descending like a dove.** We remember that Jesus shared our thirst and a Samaritan woman shared water from a well.

All: Living Water, pour your Spirit upon us. Wash us and free us from sin, make us fruitful in every way, and renew your world with showers of blessing.

(Voices Together #930 ©2020 MennoMedia.)



Baptism involves water [1]. In liturgical theology it is not uncommon to consider the symbolic significance of the rite itself. When we do that, we develop a symbolic imagination similar to that of the earliest Christians, and we find that much of what the Church believes about baptism is what we all believe about water more generally [2]. So, what *does* water mean?

Water Washes Us

Perhaps the most obvious symbolic meaning of baptism is washing. When Ananias is about to baptize Paul in the book of Acts, he says,



Now why do you wait? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord! (Acts 22:16).



A significant part of this washing away of sins is the invitation to live in a new way of life. Anabaptists have long argued against baptism as a means of mediating salvation or grace. Baptism has no magical power. Baptism is not salvation itself, but baptism is a personal commitment to walk and live in the grace which is *given* to us, through Jesus Christ. Traditionally we've called this "regeneration," and it has been symbolized by taking off old clothes and putting on new ones (practiced literally in the patristic period).

At minimum, the simple gesture of washing at baptism reminds us that it is indeed God who washes us. **We don't wash ourselves. God washes us, makes us clean, regenerates us, renews us.**

We Depend on Water

The early Anabaptists developed a theology of sacraments and worship in reaction to the medieval Church and the Magisterial Reformation. For these groups, the definitive characteristic was God's initiative. However, the Anabaptists emphasized the human response of faith and love. They were cautious to not imbue the physical water, wine, and bread with supernatural powers. **Yet if water doesn't make a difference, then why baptize at all? Because we need it.**

As much as Anabaptists emphasized human response, they were also ardent that we are saved by grace through faith, not sacramental mediation. We need the waters of baptism to remind us of our God-given status. Just as we depend on water for life, we depend on God for our salvation.



We need the waters of baptism to remind us of our God-given status. Just as we depend on water for life, we depend on God for our salvation.

That means that baptism is a public testimony to our adoption as God's children *and* our ordination into Christ's ministry where our gifts are released. We receive baptism as a gift, and it challenges our pretensions of self-sufficiency and omnipotence. We are dependent upon God for our identity as God's children. God does for us what we can't do on our own.

Water Drowns Us

One of the most common ways of speaking about baptism in the New Testament, particularly by Paul, is to refer to it as death or drowning. **In baptism we die to old definitions of ourselves and rise to discover our identity in Christ.** Paul writes to the Colossians and to the Galatians:



You have been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him...He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses (*Colossians 2:12-13*).



There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; you are all one in Christ Jesus. (*Galatians 3:28*).



In Christ through baptism there is a new creation going on — inherited social definitions are no longer basic. The believer “dies” to those definitions and rises to a new one. Baptism is the entry into a new people, a new creation, a new world. It marks a new kind of social relationship, a unity that overarches differences and separations to constitute a new, reconciled community in Christ.

Stirring the Creative Waters

1. How do we engage water in ways that call forth the rich symbolism of baptism?
2. How can water enable us to “remember our baptisms” outside of baptismal services [3]?
3. How can the water of our own baptism help connect us to the water baptism of Jesus [4]?

Part III: Baptism of Blood

“

Profession of Faith

(Name), do you renounce the evil powers in this world and turn to Jesus Christ as your Savior, trusting in God's grace and love and promising to obey Jesus as your Lord? **I do.**

Do you believe in God Almighty, creator of heaven and earth; in Jesus Christ, God's only Son; and in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life? **I do.**

Do you accept the Word of God as guide and authority for your life? **I do.**

Will you give and receive counsel in the congregation? **I will.**

Will you live without giving in to violence, resisting what is evil and taking risks for what is good? **I will.**

Will you participate in the life and mission of the church? **I will.**

(Voices Together #205 ©2020 MennoMedia.)

”

“

But Jesus said to them, 'You don't know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' (*Mark 10:38*).

”

Baptism is public and communal. It has ethical import. It involves “participating in the mission of reconciliation, justice, and peace inaugurated by Jesus, inviting our contemporaries to come to know Jesus Christ and experience the joy of faith in him and in his message. **It means witnessing, by word and action, to the truth and goodness of the Gospel in the public square**” [1].

In baptism we experience both personal and corporate salvation. Our inner and spiritual life is united to our outward and public life. The first Anabaptists believed that baptism leads to a natural confrontation between the new life of a Christian and the powers of this age. In baptism we are united to Christ in his suffering; we are “buried with him in death” [2].

“

This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with water only, but with the water and the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who testify. (*1 John 5:6-7*).

”

We understand from experiences of persecution that shaped the beginning of Anabaptism that **baptism does not extract us from the suffering of the world.** Rowan Williams explains that “you might expect to find Christian people near to those places where humanity is most at risk, where humanity is most disordered, disfigured and needy” [3] Baptism takes us to the place where we can find Jesus, “and Jesus is found in the neighbourhood of human confusion and suffering” [4].

The early Church understood baptism to relativize national identities and form a people with an alternative politic of solidarity, social-levelling, shared goods, and obedience to Christ. The Roman empire understood baptism into the Church as a threat. The Church was seen as a political club (*hetaeria*) propelled by an apocalyptic vision that appealed to the lower classes.



Baptism takes us to the place where we can find Jesus, “and Jesus is found in the neighbourhood of human confusion and suffering.”

As disciples of Jesus, Christians turn themselves in the direction of unity and reconciliation. William Stringfellow reminds us that “the witness of the Church to the world is to be the image of what the whole of creation is and is to be in the final reconciliation, and that witness requires a unity in the Church which is notorious in all the world and which the world can directly and plainly behold” [5]. Witness also requires thwarting and dismantling anything that challenges Christian unity, like racism or sexism. We know the efficacy of our baptism by the fruit it produces [6].

Make Us One

HINCKS Irregular

D G/D D Bm G

A sus A D G D

G A D/F# G A Bm

G F# Bm G

A Bm G A sus A D sus D

God—Cre - a - tor, Christ the Son, Ho - ly Spir - it—Three-in -
One, by your strength and grace we turn to the peace we
could not earn. In these wa - ters make us new;
let your grace come pour - ing through. Bring us clos - er;
make us one with your church, through Christ the Son.

(Voices Together #455, words and music by Anneli Loepp Thiessen, ©2018 Anneli Loepp Thiessen. Used with permission.)

Stirring the Creative Waters

1. How do we capture baptism’s deeply personal *and* profoundly communal dimensions?
2. How can baptismal practices bring us into relationship with the suffering of the world?
3. How can baptism become more than an “event” (a worship service at a given time and space) and point to a way of being and living in the world?

Contemporary Questions

It is no longer 1525, and we are baptizing people into an increasingly diverse Anabaptist church. We celebrate that we share so much in common, but there are many differences among us when it comes to baptism. Baptism is so thick with meaning that it can sometimes seem like an unsolvable riddle. It keeps us in a state of wonder. We list some of our “wonderings” below with the belief that when a question is not resolved, it serves as an opportunity to dream, to wrestle, and to create a richer tradition. When you engage with this list, what sparks your imagination?



When a question is not resolved, it serves as an opportunity to dream, to wrestle, and to create a richer tradition.

1

We wonder...what it means when members of the Anabaptist community choose *not* to be baptized [1]. What is our compassionate and faithful response?

2

We wonder...how baptism relates to communion [2]. Does one lead to the next? How might one enrich the meaning of the other? How might the relationship between baptism and communion help us to see baptism as a way of life, not just an event [3]?

3

We wonder...how to balance our distinct understanding of baptism with a commitment to ecumenical relationships [4]. How does our emphasis on adult baptism affect our relationships with Christians who practice infant baptism? What burden does our emphasis on adult baptism place on someone who joins the Anabaptist community after being baptized as an infant in another tradition?

4

We wonder...if baptism is accessible to people of all abilities and sensitivities [5]. What barriers might we remove? What support might we offer?

5

We wonder...how baptism, a *life-saving* ritual, relates to *life-threatening* ecological issues [6]. If baptism is rich with meaning and symbolism, what might it teach us about the climate crisis facing our contemporary world?



Baptism is more than an event in time. It is something that contains within it the contours of the Christian life.

Conclusion

The practice of worship is not always something to which we devote sustained reflection, but it is something that has — at its very core — imagination and wonder and mystery. This is the gift of worship in deepening the richness of baptism. Through the practice of worship, we engage in a way of knowing that is driven as much by the heart as by the mind. We come to understand through our senses, our intuition, our gut, perhaps more than our heads [1]. Baptism, as an act of worship, fosters our imagination, where we are invited to see the world through the eyes of faith. Through liturgical “knowing,” we can come to understand baptism as more than an event in time but as something that contains within it the contours of the Christian life [2].

Endnotes

Introduction

[1] All worship resources copyright © MennoMedia, 2020. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Shared Commitments

[1] All scripture passages are quoted in the World English Bible (WEB) translation.

[2] Much of what we express here is also articulated in a 2022 study guide by John D. Roth and Thomas Yoder Neufeld. See John Roth and Tom Yoder-Neufeld, *Believe and Be Baptized: Conversations on Baptism in the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition* (Goshen: Institute for the Global Study of Anabaptism, 2022). This material is also inspired by a 2021 document edited by Rachel Epp Buller for an art exhibition showcasing visual art contributions to *Voices Together*. See Rachel Epp Buller, ed., *Voices Together: A Celebration of Art and Music*, 2021, PDF file.

Spirit, Water, Blood

[1] John Roth and Tom Yoder-Neufeld, *Believe and Be Baptized: Conversations on Baptism in the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition* (Goshen: Institute for the Global Study of Anabaptism, 2022), 41.

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Part I: Baptism in the Spirit

[1] C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 69. Emphasis added.

[2] John Roth and Tom Yoder-Neufeld, *Believe and Be Baptized: Conversations on Baptism in the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition* (Goshen: Institute for the Global Study of Anabaptism, 2022), 8.

[3] John D. Roth, ed., “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church: Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic Trilateral Conversations 2012–2017,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 95 (January 2021): 79.

[4] Roth and Yoder-Neufeld, *Believe and Be Baptized*, 13, 28.

[5] Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 3–5.

[6] Menno Simons, excerpt from “Reply to Gellius Faber,” in Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1981), 188. See also Menno Simons, excerpt from “Foundation,” in Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 188–89. Finally, see Hans Hut, excerpt from Shornbaum, *Quellen*, in Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 169–70. Hut describes baptism as a covenant of God which God makes with people through His Spirit in their hearts.

[7] Mennonite Church Canada, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Harrisonburg: MennoMedia, 1995), Article 11.

Part II: Baptism With Water

[1] Much of this section draws from Irma Fast Dueck’s publications. See, for instance, Irma Fast Dueck, “Re-Learning to Swim in Baptismal Waters: Contemporary Challenges in the Believers Church Tradition,” in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, ed. Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder, and Karl Koop (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010), 237–55; Irma Fast Dueck, “It’s Only Water: The Ritual of Baptism and the Formation of Christian Identity,” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 12, no. 2 (2011): 21–27; Irma Fast Dueck, “Getting All Wet: Baptism and Church Membership,” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 38–45.

[2] William Willimon, *Remember Who You Are: Baptism, a Model for Christian Life* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1980). In this book, Willimon suggests that the basic truths we all understand about water — its life-giving, cleansing and sustaining properties — parallel the theological meanings of baptism in Christian faith.

[3] Isaac S. Villegas encourages Christians to remember their baptisms as a way of testifying to God’s grace, as well as the communities that have formed them. See Isaac S. Villegas, “The Testimony of Water,” *The Christian Century* 140, no. 3 (March 2023): 32–33.

[4] Isaac S. Villegas makes this link between the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of all other Christians in another one of his reflections. See Isaac Villegas, “Fully Alive: On Baptism,” Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship, January 11, 2009, <https://chapelhillmennonite.org/2009/01/fully-alive-on-baptism/>.

Part III: Baptism of Blood

[1] John D. Roth, ed., “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church: Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic Trilateral Conversations 2012–2017,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 95 (January 2021): 69.

[2] See “The Schleithem Confession (1527),” in *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H. Leith, rev. ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), 284.

[3] Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 4.

[4] Williams, 4.

[5] William Stringfellow, “The Unity of the Church as the Witness of the Church,” *Anglican Theological Review* 100, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 525.

[6] Fourth-century Christian Jerome makes this argument that baptism should mark a change in a person's life in one of his letters. See Jerome, "Letter LXIX: To Oceanus," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 6, *Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, trans. W. H. Fremantle (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 141–48.

Contemporary Questions

[1] Irma Fast Dueck is especially attentive to how young adults in the Anabaptist tradition are losing interest in baptism. In response, she calls for a renewed effort to develop a "robust 'baptismal ecology'" in their communities. See Irma Fast Dueck, "'Like a Fish in Water': Reclaiming Baptism in an Anabaptist Church," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 4–16. In a similar vein, Melissa Florer-Bixler reflects on how believer's baptism differs from infant baptism in that it leaves room for someone to discern if and when baptism is the right choice for them. See Melissa Florer-Bixler, "My Son the PK Said No to Baptism," *The Christian Century* 141, no. 5 (May 2024): 35–36.

[2] Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe paints a picture of the evolving relationship between baptism and communion for Anabaptist-Mennonites in Canada. See Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe, "From Belief to Belonging: Why Open Communion is On the Rise in MC Canada Congregations," *Canadian Mennonite* 22, no. 14 (July 2018): 4–6.

[3] James McClendon views baptism as a "performative sign" and, in doing so, argues that it should effect change in a Christian's life, whether baptism occurs in infancy or adulthood (although he favours adult baptism himself). See James W. McClendon, "Baptism as a Performative Sign," *Theology Today* 23, no. 3 (1966): 403–16. He also extends this logic to other worship practices like communion, writing that "a rethinking of the significance of baptism will surely imply a rethinking of the eucharistic sign as well." See McClendon, 413.

[4] The "concluding reflections" from Mennonites involved in the Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic Trilateral Dialogues from 2012 to 2017 serve as a model for honouring and learning from other Christian perspectives even as we retain our tradition's commitment to adult baptism. See John D. Roth, ed., "Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church: Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic Trilateral Conversations 2012–2017," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 95 (January 2021): 77–80.

[5] For further reflection on this subject, see Melissa Florer-Bixler, "Believers Baptism as Supported Decision," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 135–46. In association with Anabaptist Disabilities Network, Jeanne Davies has developed a resource for making baptism accessible to people of varying abilities. See Jeanne Davies, *Believing and Belonging: An Accessible Anabaptist Membership Curriculum* (Elgin: Brethren Press, 2023).

[6] A 2011 article by Benjamin M. Stewart provides a point of entry into this conversation. See Benjamin M. Stewart, "The Ecology of Baptism: Water in Worship," *The Christian Century* 128, no. 3 (February 2011): 22–25.

Conclusion

[1] "The liturgy, like the feast, exists not to educate but to seduce people into participating in common activity of the highest order, where one is free to learn things which cannot be taught." Aiden Kavanaugh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1984), x.

[2] See Rowan Williams, "Sacramental Living," St. Peter's Public Lectures, Trinity College/University of Melbourne, May 14 and 16, 2002, <https://www.trinity.unimelb.edu.au/getmedia/b1ef15dc-6fdc-4212-81ed-c699ca1dd1f9/TrinityPaper32.aspx>