CTQ 90 (2026): 99–109

Unum Baptisma in Light of Ephesians 4:4–6 and Paul's Baptismal Paraclesis

M. Samuli Siikavirta

1. Introduction

When asked to give a paper on a topic related to the seventeen hundredth anniversary of the Nicene Creed, I did not need to think twice. To a Pauline scholar who has worked on the role that Baptism plays at the crossroads of Paul's theological and ethical teaching, the obvious topic to pick was the baptismal clause of the creed borrowed from Ephesians 4. This choice, however, was an anachronistic one, because when the Nicene Creed was written in AD 325, it had no mention of Baptism in it whatsoever. The creed ended in the words "And in the Holy Ghost" before concluding with an affixed anathema of the Arians.[1]

The questions of what constituted a valid baptism and whether "rebaptism" was ever required were being asked already in the context of the universal persecutions of Christians, the falsified certificates of pagan worship to which many Christians resorted, and the widespread apostasy under the emperor Decius (AD 249–251) and in the various persecutions that followed right up to the Edict of Milan in AD 313, which put a stop to them. In the wake of such persecutions, the Donatist controversy arose at Carthage in the year AD 311. In the same time period, the church was infiltrated by Arian and other anti-Nicene heretics and schismatics.[2] The canons of the Council of Nicaea show that the matters of apostasy and the need for a "rebaptism" were being discussed already in AD 325 in the presence of some bishops who had had their left legs crippled and right eyes blinded in the persecutions under Maximinus Daza a mere fourteen or so years prior to the council.[3] Despite this, the actual

[1] Much could be said about the historic background of the *unum baptisma* clause in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of AD 381. For the purposes of this article, however, suffice it to refer to the accounts in the following works: Leo D. Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325–787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1983); Jared Ortiz and Daniel A. Keating, *The Nicene Creed: A Scriptural, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024); and, for those who read Finnish, Antti Laato, *Kaste kirkon alkuaikoina* (Baptism in the Early Church Period)*, Studier i exegetik och judaistik utgivna av Teologiska fakulteten vid Åbo Akademi Nr. 5* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 2008).

[2] Ortiz and Keating*, Nicene Creed*, 196.

[3] Schismatics such as the Novatianists and Donatists were not required to be "rebaptized" because their apostasy did not constitute a Trinitarian or Christological heresy, unlike the Paulianists, who were guilty of the adoptionist heresy, rendering their baptismal formula invalid and their ordinations likewise void (Davis, *First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 58, 66–67).

M. Samuli Siikavirta is Assistant Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary. He can be contacted at samuli.siikavirta@ctsfw.edu.

baptismal clause appears not to have been added to the creed until the First Council of Constantinople in AD 381. The quotation of Ephesians 4:5 in the creed as we have it responds to the questions that troubled the church plagued by persecutions and schisms: Should those baptized by bishops and priests who had apostatized during the persecutions be baptized anew, or (depending on the answer) for the first time? Or is there a possibility of a second repentance? Can a baptism administered by an apostate pastor even be a valid baptism at all? And apart from persecution, what should the church think about baptisms administered by heretics or schismatics who had cut themselves off the one holy and apostolic church simply by professing a christological heresy?

In this article based on the aforementioned presentation, I shall address the baptismal clause of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed by first honing in on its scriptural basis in Ephesians 4:4–6 and on Paul's[4] baptismal teaching in that epistle and, secondly, by reflecting on how to apply this teaching to the life of the church, which confesses the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and its *unum baptisma* clause today.

2. Ephesians 4:4–6 and Paul's Baptismal Paraclesis

Let us now turn to the biblical source of the *unum baptisma* statement—the "one baptism" in Ephesians 4 and its application in Paul's paraclesis.[5]

We should first notice that the context in which the ἓν βάπτισμα ("one baptism") in Ephesians 4 occurs is somewhat different from the second-to-third-century questions that led to its inclusion in the creed. There is a lot of scholarly debate on whether a particular situation of disunity between Jewish and Gentile Christians was being remedied by this unifying exhortation, which may be implied from the wider context of the epistle only.[6] As we read in Acts 19:1–7, Paul had encountered in Ephesus a baptism that was not a Baptism into Christ, namely, John's baptism. Perhaps this still needed to be corrected when Paul wrote Ephesians.[7] The existence of multiple Jewish ablutions may also have caused confusion within the church,

[4] For a nuanced defense of the possibility of upholding the traditional view of Pauline authorship of Ephesians, see Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1–3* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2008), 36–52. For a more thorough account, see Thomas M. Winger, *Ephesians,* Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 25–77.

[5] I prefer the term "paraclesis" over the more widely used "paraenesis," which denotes a Hellenistic rhetorical style of exhortation. "Paraclesis" is, after all, the term that Paul himself uses (cf. 1 Thess 4:1, 4:10, 5:14; 1 Cor 1:10, 4:16, 16:15; 2 Cor 2:8, 6:1, 10:1; Rom 12:1, 15:30, 16:17; Phlm 8–10). In fact, Paul talks about "paraclesis" explicitly in Eph 4:1, where we read the apostle introduce the topic by dictating to his scribe παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς ("I encourage you"). See Winger, *Ephesians*, 425–426, for a discussion of paraclesis as preaching and encouragement.

[6] For a summary, see Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 232–233. Another possible reason may be Paul's own situation as a prisoner because of the Gentiles (Acts 21); see Winger, *Ephesians*, 483.

[7] Cf. Winger, *Ephesians*, 489.

leading to the need for Paul to explicitly teach "one baptism" to the Ephesians.[8] Andrew Lincoln argues the following:

> For Ephesians, it is no longer Israel, nor is it the world with its alienations and divisions, but it is the Church that is the expression of God's unity. There is an obvious corollary to such a notion. When the Church fails to maintain and express unity, it radically undermines the credibility of its belief in the one God.[9]

While the *unum baptisma* phrase in the creed answers questions of the possibility of a second repentance[10] and the validity of baptism administered by apostates, the profoundly theological baptismal reference in Ephesians stands in the context of unifying ethical paraclesis. Ephesians 4 begins, in Lincoln's words, "one of the most extended pieces of paraenesis in any of the letters of the Pauline corpus."[11] Lincoln rightly goes on to explain that Paul's paraenesis (paraclesis) serves the purpose of "reminding the readers of who they are as the Church in Christ."[12]

Thomas Winger rightly suggests that "*Eph. 4:5 is perhaps the central line of the entire epistle.*"[13] And at the heart of that core of Pauline paraclesis in Ephesians 4 lies the matter of unity within the Church. This is shown by verses 13–15.[14] The seven repeated number "ones" in all three grammatical genders teach in a manner similar to the four number "ones" in the creed: There are one God; one Lord Jesus Christ; one holy, catholic, and apostolic church; and one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. As Jared Ortiz and Daniel Keating summarize the similarity between Ephesians 4 and the wording of the creed, "There is one baptism because there is one God and one Lord who founded one Church into which we are baptized. . . . There is one Body of Christ and one baptism in Christ that makes us a part of that body."[15]

Paul's references to the "one body, one Spirit, being called in the one hope of one's calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all" do not occur in a vacuum. These references all link his unifying paraclesis with the first three chapters of the letter. As Lincoln words it, chapters 1–3 of Ephesians as a whole may be seen as a "thanksgiving for and reminder of the significance and privileges

---

[8] Laato, *Kaste*, 95.

[9] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 241.

[10] Already the second-century *Shepherd of Hermas* taught a second and only possibility of repentance in certain cases after Baptism (Hermas 31; 72:3–6; 73–76). The observation in *Hermas* shows how important it is to let Scripture interpret Scripture. While there are indeed texts in the New Testament that appear to teach the impossibility of a second repentance, such as Heb 6:4–6 and 10:22–27, the Holy Spirit opens up the meaning of those texts to us in light of 1 John 1:8–10 and 5:16–17 and the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), which do teach the possibility of a second and, indeed, consequent repentance. See Laato, *Kaste*, 112–113.

[11] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 224.

[12] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 224.

[13] Winger, *Ephesians*, 434 (emphasis original).

[14] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 224–225.

[15] Ortiz and Keating, *Nicene Creed*, 193–194.

of their calling as part of the Church."[16] More concretely, the exhortation to live worthily of one's calling is grounded in the calling mentioned in Ephesians 1:18: "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you [ἡ ἐλπὶς τῆς κλήσεως αὐτοῦ], what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints."[17] Calling and enlightenment in Ephesians 1:18 are baptismal language,[18] just as the more implicit theme of calling and the explicit mentioning of light are in Colossians 1:12–13 and, indeed, in the account of the calling and Baptism of Saul himself (Acts 9:3–18).

Although the majority of scholars who today deny the Pauline authorship of Ephesians find here an argument for their "Deutero-Pauline" view (i.e., that the author consciously copied Paul's style elsewhere to appear credible), the view here defended that takes the claim in Ephesians 1:1 of Pauline authorship to be true concentrates on the similarities in content between this passage and others in the Pauline corpus, such as 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12 and Colossians 3:12–15, as proof for Pauline authorship.[19] Parallel references to one Lord appear in other epistles (e.g., in 1 Cor 8:6 and Rom 11:36). All of this New Testament talk of unity is, in its turn, based on the Jewish thought that the unity of the people can be derived from the oneness of God (e.g., Philo, *Virt.* 7.35; cf. the Shema of Deut 6:4).[20] Thus we may see how unity in the life of the church is founded on the unity in God. This shows how Pauline ethics always stand on the solid foundation of doctrine. Pauline doctrine, in its turn, always has ethical implications.

As we hone in on verses 4–6, let us first pause to consider the seven mentions of the number "one." Winger insightfully asks, "Can it be insignificant that Paul's presentation of this creed includes precisely seven occurrences of the word 'one'? The divine perfection is presented as seven, three (the Trinity), and 'one.' Christian unity is rooted in the divine unity."[21]

We may hear in Paul's abrupt-sounding sevenfold acclamations "a traditional confessional acclamation which had its origin in a baptismal setting" that is likely built upon one or two pieces of preexisting creedal material.[22] Therefore, what became part of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed has much older roots that go directly back to the apostolic age.[23] That early creedal material, in turn, points to an even earlier reality, namely, our Lord's institution of the one Baptism in the triune

[16] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 231.

[17] Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the ESV.

[18] *Contra* Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 58, who unnecessarily separates the "inner enlightenment" through the gospel from baptismal enlightenment.

[19] Cf. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 227.

[20] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 238, 240.

[21] Winger, *Ephesians*, 481.

[22] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 228–229.

[23] On the impossibility of knowing for sure whether this is a preexisting creed, hymn, or chant, see Winger, *Ephesians*, 480.

name (Matt 28:19). The Trinity—here confessed as ἓν πνεῦμα, εἷς κύριος and εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων ("one Spirit . . . one Lord . . . one God and Father of all," Eph 4:4–6)—is the true source of unity. The one Baptism in his name and into the one faith and into the one body of Christ was an experience shared by all Ephesian Christians, both Jew and Gentile. It is only on the foundation of this baptismal unity that the diversity of Christ's gifts and vocations mentioned in verses 7–16 can be seen as complementary instead of competing.[24] It is only on the foundation of this baptismal unity that such varied callings within the one body build the body up in brotherly love rather than tear it down in fraternal jealousy.[25]

There is one vocation, however, that stands out in Ephesians 4:11–16. In those verses, Paul emphasizes the central role that the apostolic ministry of the Word and its various subcategories play in implementing such unity. In Lincoln's words, "These ministers are to be seen as no less than gifts of the exalted Christ to his church, who will play a vital role both in the maintenance of its unity and in the preservation of its true teaching, the apostolic tradition of the gospel of Christ (vv. 7–16, cf. also 4:20, 21)."[26] This reality is something for pastors and men being trained and tried for the office of our Lord to remember. Shepherds of the flock of Christ play a vital role in the preservation of true unity in the church as they preach and teach the word of God.

Paul himself sets us an example of this kind of ministry in action.[27] His task is to remind the Ephesians of what they should already know, using emphatically cognitive means.[28] In Ephesians 1:15–23, Paul prays for his Ephesian flock, that God would give them "the Spirit of *wisdom* and of revelation in the *knowledge* of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may *know* what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe." Similarly, in 3:18–19, *comprehension* of the breadth, length, height, and depth of the gospel of Christ and *knowledge* of the love of Christ surpassing knowledge is Paul's hope in his prayers for the recipients. Paul *reminds* (μνημονεύετε, 2:11–13[29]) the Ephesians of their former existence without Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of

[24] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 225.

[25] A similar connection between Baptism and unity is also to be found in Gal 3:27, 3:28; and 1 Cor 12:13.

[26] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 233.

[27] My argument in the rest of this section is based on my earlier work in Samuli Siikavirta, *Baptism and Cognition in Romans 6–8: Paul's Ethics beyond "Indicative" and "Imperative,"* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. 407 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 96–98.

[28] By "cognition" and "cognitive," I simply mean action occupying the mind, for example by way of knowledge, understanding, remembrance, and reminder.

[29] Paul refers to Baptism by allusion to the new creation in Eph 2:14–22.

Israel, just as he reminds them of their drastically-improved current state in Christ.[30] In 5:8 and 5:14, Paul again refers to the past experience of spiritual darkness and death, verse 14 possibly being another baptismal hymn chanted to the catechumens.[31]

In Ephesians 4:1, to have been called is not just a matter of the past but also something in which those who are called ought to continue to walk. The calling has a purpose: through the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching office, those who are sanctified in the Lord are made ready by the Lord for the ἔργον διακονίας ("the work of the ministry") to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12), the ultimate goal of which is "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" defined as spiritual maturity (Eph 4:13) that is not shaken by false teaching (Eph 4:14).

The Gentiles walk in the futility of the νοῦς ("mind," Eph 4:17), which the Christians should now avoid. The Gentiles have a darkened διάνοια ("mind, thought, understanding") and there is ἄγνοια ("ignorance") in them (Eph 4:18), which, as a state of a hardened heart and loss of shame, has led to sensuality, greed, and impurity (Eph 4:19; cf. 2:3). The roots of such behavior, displeasing to God, are again very much cognitive. Equally cognitive is what the recipients of the epistle are assumed to have. They have *learned* (ἐμάθετε) Christ thus (Eph 4:20), assuming that they were *taught* (ἐδιδάχθητε) in him (Eph 4:21) in the first place. This teaching is a reference to baptismal catechesis. The putting off of the old man and putting on of the new in Ephesians 4:22 and 4:24 points to this connection (cf. Gal 3:27; Col 3:5–11).[32] In this way, the substance of Ephesians 4:22–24 is similar to that of Romans 6.[33] We may, in fact, read the author's calling language in conjunction not just with the idea of divine election[34] but also with this election becoming concrete in the baptismal rite. What else was the baptismal rite except a divine calling to be Christ's own and to offer oneself as a servant of God?

What, then, does the cognitive reminder of the baptismal state in Ephesians 4 have to do with the rest of the epistle? The grammatical imperatives of Ephesians 4:25–6:9 follow right after this; they stem from this learning, relearning, and renewed understanding, and they encourage the recipients of this reminder to apply it at a practical level, with examples. They culminate in the warfare exhortations of

[30] Remembering in the Bible is often more than a mere "mental act moving backward in time"; it calls for repentance and gratitude and can even be described as a cultic-like action that "uses the past as a precedent for the present and future time." In this passage, Paul's emphasis is on the Ephesians' incorporation into Israel by God. So Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, 147, 255–256.

[31] So also Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 331.

[32] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 272.

[33] The same could be said about Eph 4:17–19 and Rom 1:21, 1:24 (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 273). Also similar to Rom 6 in Eph 4:17–24 are the references to the passions. The seal of the Spirit given until the day of redemption in Eph 4:30 also strongly echoes Rom 8:23.

[34] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 234.

Ephesians 6:10–18, where the point is made clear that the present life in Christ is still an ongoing battle against evil—a battle in which one may persevere only when dressed in the armor of God, that is, with the tools he gives for the fight. However, amid these practical imperatives, Ephesians 5:17 is extremely cognitive: "Therefore do not become senseless (ἄφρονες), but understand (συνίετε) what the will of the Lord is."[35] We may therefore infer with Markus Barth:

> Indeed the juxtaposition of preaching and teaching (kerygma and didache), of indicative and imperative, may have had its day. Their undeniable usefulness as hermeneutical tools may be exhausted. . . . Their imposition upon a hymnodic or prayerlike document like Ephesians may be as inappropriate as the attempt to measure the beauty of a symphony with a yardstick or a barometer. . . . The sequence, God (or Christ) did this for you—now you have to do that for him, is a ridiculous caricature of the relationship between God's grace and the good works for which man is created, according to Eph 2:5–10.[36]

What this brief outline has shown is that the teaching of the baptismal state in Christ and the cognition of its significance interact closely in Paul's paraclesis in Ephesians, just as they do throughout the Pauline corpus. In my book on Romans 6–8, I have argued that using the popular indicative-imperative terminology to explain the relationship between theology and ethics in the Pauline epistles should be avoided, as it makes that relationship into an abstraction. It is much more helpful and truthful to the Pauline texts to talk about the interplay between Paul's concrete references to earlier baptismal catechesis and the post-baptismal catechesis, or in other words, the third use of the law, that always follows from it without exception (including the second half of Ephesians 4!). It would therefore be preferable to talk about Baptism and its cognition as defined above in light of Paul's teaching rather than as an

[35] My translation. In Eph 5:25b–27, Paul describes both Baptism (καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι) and sanctification as Christ's acts. The allusion to water would have been taken as a reference to the baptismal rite by Paul's addressees.

[36] Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, 54–55. In saying this, Barth goes against the usual division of Ephesians into the dogmatic chapters 1–3 and ethical chapters 4–6 (53–54); cf. Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4–6* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 426, 453–457, 522, 620. He brings "indicative" and "imperative" together by seeing both as part of the divine calling of the Christian, which includes "a high status and a correspondingly high responsibility and task" (454). Paul's "very imperatives imply a privilege the saints can enjoy, not a burden they ought to bear," and they "can be a means of preaching the gospel" as they point to the freedom that is already theirs (455). The Pauline kerygma is, in Barth's view, no "legalistic appendix" that limits or revokes the gospel but another form of preaching "the sheer pure gospel," which contradicts the Lutheran law-gospel dichotomy and is akin to "the praising narration of God's mighty acts found in the OT historical books and Psalms, and in the NT Gospels and Acts" (456–457). Barth summarizes his reading of Paul's exhortation as "evangelical ethics" and explains, "The 'way of the Lord' pointed out by the social and moral teachings of Paul is not a corollary to redemption but is comparable to Israel's procession out of Egypt and through the wilderness; it is itself the way of salvation, life, and freedom. On this way, God's saving will is carried out" (457; cf. 522). Cf. Winger, *Ephesians*, 476–479.

indicative-imperative dichotomy when explaining how theology and ethics interact in the Pauline epistles.

Lastly and interestingly, the cognitive paraclesis that follows from the creedal-baptismal passage of Ephesians 4:4–6 concludes with a reference to the only effect of Baptism mentioned in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed—the forgiveness of sins (Eph 4:32). Forgiveness is indeed the most central gift of Baptism in the Scriptures (Acts 2:38, 22:16; Mark 16:16; Rom 6:7; cf. Matt 1:21; Luke 1:76–77; John 20:23), and it was the post-baptismal forgiveness that was a topic of dispute in the early church amid apostasy, heresy, and schism.

3. Application to the Life of the Church Today

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, false teaching was an ongoing threat to the unity of the church, and a clear trinitarian and baptismal confession needed to be made. Similarly, at the Council of Nicaea, the Arians were condemned yet by no means quenched. Arian Christology grew increasingly popular. Even the emperor Constantine himself, who summoned the council, was later baptized on his deathbed by the Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia in AD 337.[37] This continuing threat is the reason the First Council of Constantinople was necessary, and it is therefore no wonder that the baptismal debate of the first ecumenical council was summarized in the baptismal clause of the creed of the second ecumenical council. One Baptism is enough for the forgiveness of sins. Although Christians are not called to "continue in sin that grace may abound" (Rom 6:1), forgiveness is readily available for all who confess their sins (1 John 1:9). It is enough to return to one's baptismal forgiveness rather than to repeat it. It is crucial, however, that the Baptism has been conducted not only with water and using the right words, but also within the proper trinitarian-christological confession. How that is to be interpreted is an interesting question to which we shall return below.

Despite the different contexts and questions that led to this teaching in Paul and, three centuries later, in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, it is evident that concern for true unity in the church in both faith and life is common to both settings. What, then, does the confession of the one Baptism for the remission of sins mean for us and for the church today?

Let us briefly turn to our Lutheran Confessions. In line with the decisions of the first ecumenical councils, the Augsburg Confession, article IX, condemns Anabaptism, and article VIII condemns Donatism.[38] In article XII, the Lutheran church

[37] Davis, *First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 77.

[38] Similarly and much earlier, Saint Augustine (AD 354–430), whose conversion took place in AD 386, five years after the First Council of Constantinople, taught boldly against the Donatist heresy. Referring to the words of John the Baptist about the Messiah, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt 3:11), Augustine emphasizes the work of the Trinity in the sacrament

confesses the possibility of post-baptismal repentance whenever needed through Holy Absolution, condemning Novatianism, which taught the opposite.

In pronouncing an anathema to Donatism, article VIII quotes Matthew 23:2, where Jesus tells the disciples to observe what the scribes and the Pharisees sitting on Moses' seat say, but that passage continues, "but [observe] not the works they do" (Matt 23:3).[39] This implies what Luther teaches explicitly in his *Baptismal Booklet* (1523): that pastors, sponsors, and witnesses should approach Baptism with great solemnity and zeal, with a strong faith and great devotion, as opposed to approaching it in a cold and casual way. This kind of pious attitude is important despite the condemnation of Donatism and Novatianism (i.e., that the validity of Baptism does not hinge on the holiness of the baptizer).[40] Luther exhorts the following:

> For this reason it is right and proper not to allow drunken and boorish priests to baptize nor to select good-for-nothings as godparents. Instead fine, moral, serious, upright priests and godparents ought to be chosen, who can be expected to treat the matter with seriousness and true faith, lest this high sacrament be abandoned to the devil's mockery and dishonor God, who in this sacrament showers upon us the vast and boundless riches of his grace.[41]

Surely this Lutheran principle applies both to pastors who teach heresy and to godparents who live in open sin today (such as by cohabiting out of wedlock). This has nothing to do with Donatism, of course, but rather with being faithful servants of Christ and stewards of the holy mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1–2).

In his sermon on the third Sunday after Epiphany in 1525, Luther preached that the Waldensians should be rebaptized just as they rebaptize "our folks," for if they do not teach that Baptism affects what it does, namely, that it saves, then it is no Christian baptism at all.[42] What do we make of Luther's suggestion? Is it contrary to

---

and downplays the significance of the person or character of the baptizer. He writes, "Although many ministers—whether just or unjust—were going to baptize, the holiness of baptism would not be attributed to anyone but to him upon whom the dove came down, about whom it was said, This is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Let Peter baptize, this is the one who baptizes; let Paul baptize, this is the one who baptizes; let Judas baptize, this is the one who baptizes" (Augustine, *Homily* 6.7, in *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1–40*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. III/12, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* [Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2009], 127). Already before Augustine, Pope Stephen (who died in AD 257) had argued that the worthiness of the baptizer did not affect the validity of Baptism, for it is God himself who acts in the sacrament and validates it (Ortiz and Keating, *Nicene Creed*, 194; and Laato, *Kaste*, 98–100).

[39] Laato, *Kaste*, 142–147.

[40] Laato, *Kaste*, 161.

[41] Martin Luther, *Baptismal Booklet*, quoted in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. Charles Arand et al.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 371–375.

[42] Martin Luther, *Evangelium auf den 3. Sonntag nach Epiphanias. Matth. 8,1ff. Fastenpostille 1525*, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Schriften], 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), 17/2: 72, 78–88 (quoted in Laato, *Kaste*, 153).

the "one baptism" in Ephesians and to the *unum baptisma* in the creed? Is it political rhetoric that should not be taken so seriously? Is Luther here standing with Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ambrose, who took a strong stance against the validity of baptisms administered by heretics and unbelievers?[43] Is there room for this kind of thought today within the reality of an ever more splintered Christendom? The Lutheran church has since recognized the validity of trinitarian Baptisms conducted in the context of the trinitarian confession.[44] For that reason, we baptize a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness with a Christian Baptism for the first time when one from such a background joins the Lutheran Church. The so-called progressive push for a gender-neutral "trinity" means that the people who were first "baptized" in the gender-neutral name of "Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier" without therefore making a proper distinction between the divine Persons as they have been revealed to us in Scripture should, when joining our Lutheran churches, be given a proper Christian Baptism as well, even if the denomination in which such baptism was administered formally subscribed to trinitarian theology.[45] Perhaps the church catholic should be more thorough at considering how far the limits of a trinitarian confession and a scripturally-based baptismal intention can be pushed.

Even when a Baptism has been administered correctly in the trinitarian context, it remains true that the baptized may forsake their baptismal grace. Ortiz and Keating helpfully put it as such:

> This raises one final point that Augustine also helpfully clarifies: a baptism may be valid but not fruitful. Any water baptism using the trinitarian formula can be a true baptism, but it might not bear fruit in the life of the one baptized. If the person remains outside the Church, continues in schism, or persists in a sinful way of life, then there will be no spiritual fruits from the valid baptism.[46]

---

[43] The second-century Latin church father Tertullian (AD 155–220) wrote that heretics had neither the same God nor the same Christ, and, therefore, neither the same baptism that was not a baptism at all (*De Baptismo* 15). Saint Cyprian (ca. AD 210–258) held a strict view excluding the possibility of a valid baptism when administered by heretics, whereas those who had been baptized in the church catholic, but who had later apostatized, would not need to be baptized anew upon returning to the church repentantly (*Ep.* 69–70). The Donatists were inspired by Tertullian and Cyprian, claiming that the baptisms conducted by those who had recanted Christ during the persecutions could not be valid (Ortiz and Keating, *Nicene Creed*, 194). Even Saint Ambrose (AD 333–397) wrote in the fourth century, "There are many kinds of baptism, but 'one baptism' is the cry of the apostle. Why? There are so-called baptisms among unbelievers, but they are not baptisms. They are washings but cannot be baptisms" (Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* 2.1.2., quoted in M. J. Edwards and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, vol. 8, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005], 160).

[44] Similarly, Ortiz and Keating, *Nicene Creed*, 195.

[45] As the church catholic confesses, *Opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* ("the external works of the Trinity are indivisible"). Since each divine Person participates in the work of the other Persons, to replace the biblical names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with titles that highlight the particular work of each Person does not make a sufficient distinction between the Persons.

[46] Ortiz and Keating, *Nicene Creed*, 195; cf. LC IV.

This is the reason why what Paul does in Ephesians is what the church catholic and her ministers are still called to do today: to invite the scattered flock of God into the unity of Baptism. That baptismal unity lays the foundation for the true unity of the church as confessed in the Augsburg Confession, article VII, where Ephesians 4:5–6 is quoted. That baptismal unity concerns both one's faith and one's way of life both in Paul's ancient pagan context and in this increasingly neo-pagan western world of ours.

In hearkening to that call, let us continue to remember that our biblical and Niceno-Constantinopolitan confession of Baptism for the forgiveness of sins remains a great source of comfort to all of us who live in this body of death in whose members sin dwells (Rom 7:23–24). Luther pronounces this comfort most clearly in his Large Catechism, and we conclude with his words:

> Thus it appears what a great, excellent thing Baptism is, which delivers us from the jaws of the devil and makes us God's own, suppresses and takes away sin, and then daily strengthens the new man; and is and remains ever efficacious until we pass from this estate of misery to eternal glory. . . . But if any one fall away from it, let him again come into it. For just as Christ, the Mercy-seat, does not recede from us or forbid us to come to Him again, even though we sin, so all His treasure and gifts also remain. If, therefore, we have once in Baptism obtained forgiveness of sin, it will remain every day, as long as we live, that is, as long as we carry the old man about our neck.[47]

[47] LC IV 83, 86, in W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente, eds., *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 751, 753.