

Baptism research paper essay



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Baptism As Both Sign and Symbol Throughout the course of organized religion both present and past, ritualistic acts of praise and worship have been practiced as a sign of both love and honor to God. Catholicism refers to these rituals as sacraments. As Christians and members of this faith, the first sacrament received by each member is Baptism. This sacrament has not only been practiced since the beginning of our faith, but has deep meaning and symbolic ties to the start of creation with Adam and Eve.

I hope to prove through both illustration and published works how Baptism as a sacrament is both a sign and symbol of humanities desire to become closer to God by cleansing them of original sin through this ritual and rite of passage. Although tied together and related a sign is not the same thing as a symbol. It is important in the understanding of Baptism as both a sign and symbol to discuss how the two are similar yet different. “ A sign is something that points to another reality and means what it signifies; meaning it is mostly fixed. ” (Muller 125) An example of this would be a deaf child at play sign on a street.

The street sign informs people that a deaf child lives on that street however does not mean that the deaf child is currently playing. There is usually no guessing involved with signs even in biblical sense due to the fact that they are straight forward in the message it portrays. A symbol on the other hand, “ is a multidimensional sign that points to another reality and manifests the reality to which it points. ” (Mueller 125) In many ways all of the seven sacraments are excellent examples of such things. Sacraments can be interpreted in many ways depending on who is looking at it.

Even though they are signs that use such things as water to represent cleansing and host to represent the body of Christ, they are much deeper symbolic rituals that bring us closer to achieving the Divine-human encounter we seek as Christians. Baptism is one of the best sacraments that show how both signs and symbols work together to bring us closer to God. Baptism is the first sacrament we as Catholics receive as a member of the church. It is seen as a rite of initiation through the cleansing of original sin. Every human being is believed to be born with original sin because of the act of wrong doing committed to God by Adam in the beginning of time. In the ritual, holy water is poured over either our head or body while the priest makes the sign of the cross and recites prayers. As an active member of the church, it is an amazing thing to witness and celebrate in because it truly demonstrates the immense love and forgiveness God has for each of his children. The necessity of such an act is detrimental to our salvation and growth as seen in Mark 16: 16, “ He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Bible 1563) Belief in Christ and our willingness to try and model our own lives after his is another way Baptism can be seen as a sign and symbol. As with all of the seven sacraments we are brought closer to Christ and are eternally bonded with him through symbolic rituals during every liturgy. “ All members of the church must recognize that each and all of us, by virtue of baptism, share in the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. ” (Tkacik 27) Through such beliefs many have posed many questions even as basic as what does the sacrament do?

Most simply and well put, “ Baptism offers a foretaste of eschatological glory. ” (Turner 379) Just as Jesus himself was baptized so we must also we washed and cleansed with the power and grace of God symbolized in the form of water. Christ himself once baptized was seen in the eyes of his father, God, as his own son. “ Baptism serves as the door through which man enters into the House of Eternal Wisdom the Church for, without it, a man cannot be united completely with the Savior, become a member of His Church, receive the other Sacraments, and be the heir to Eternal Life. (Monk website) As the main sacramental sign, water signifies “ new birth, new life, and new creation by incorporating the initiate into Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. ” (Mueller 139) This can be interpreted in many ways however the church tries to simplify this complex theory by teaching us why and what the water symbolizes. Just as Christ was crucified and died, our submersion in water symbolizes us too dying with him. In turn, our removal from the water symbolizes our rebirth and connection with Christ giving us our first divine-human encounter.

The depth of such an act clearly portrays how vital of a part cleansing of sins by way of water is important and used in our faith since the beginning of time and an example of initiation into Christ’s life. Water has, since the beginning of time, been used to symbolize cleansing and new beginnings and in turn a major reason why this sign is seen as such in the symbolic ritual. In conjunction with water being a sign of initiation into the church so are the symbolic acts of the priest during the sacrament. The symbolic act of laying hands by the priest, parents and godparents during the anointing of the initiate with chrism emphasizes the sacrament’s communal character. ”

(Mueller 139) As all of the parties involved are members of the church, baptism is the first act of initiation of us into our own Christ filled community known as the church. Involving various active member of the church brings together the church of past, present and future alike. The priest acts as Christ, who through his own actions, anointed people of all walks of life through baptism.

The parents and godparents symbolize the foundation of Christianity formed through the apostles act of spreading Jesus' word. The symbol of community can be seen and felt only through such an intimate event such as this which brings us closer to our ultimate destiny as disciples of God. With knowledge of why and how we are baptized, the next quest in understanding this holy sacrament would to justify its necessity in our faith. The Catholic Encyclopedia goes in depth on such a topic. " Theologians distinguish a twofold necessity which they call a necessity of means and a necessity of precept.

The first indicates a thing to be necessary that, if lacking salvation cannot be attained. The second is had when a thing is indeed so necessary that it may not be omitted voluntarily without sin. " (Nelson) The twofold theory can be broken down and used in showing how baptism is both sign and symbol of Christ. The discussion of necessity of means demonstrates how through Jesus' own actions and words of how we can attain salvation through such acts as baptism prove this notion just. In turn, being that this sacrament deals with original sin, it being a necessity of precept is also valid.

This is due to the fact that we as Catholics believe to knowingly disobey the will of God is to sin. As seen in Matthew 28: 19, “ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. ” (Bible 1526) Seen in this passage it is clear what order God gave to the early church emphasizing the importance and need of baptism obligating all who serve him to be baptized.

Seen throughout the bible, baptism is often referred to as such a vital and keen part of the formation of ones spirituality. For this reason baptism is seen as a symbol of not only initiation into the church but initiation into the life of Christ as teacher, brother and heavenly king. Much like the sign of the cross symbolizes ones personal faith as a Catholic in the trinity, baptism symbolizes our desire to begin our Christian lives through and act and sign of cleansing. Every other major and important sacrament that follows draws directly from our initiation in baptism.

Confirmation can be used as a perfect example of this very statement. “ The interconnection between baptism and the apostolate has been comprised over time. ” (Tkacik 26) Confirming ones faith seals in ones beliefs and communal belonging professed during baptism acts as a sign of how much baptism means to the Roman Catholic Church. In closing, the sacrament of baptism clearly demonstrates humanities desire to be closer to God and his kingdom. Baptism through the use of many instrumental signs continues to be a symbol of our quest for our own personal divine-human encounter with Christ.

Original Sin is just a part of way millions of Christians around the world become baptized each year. It is a symbol of initiation and purification into a holy community carried out by believers. As one of the oldest and most symbolic of rituals performed by the church, it is only through personal love and admiration of God and his creation that this sacrament can live on and continue to be the back bone of our faith as modern day Christians. Works Cited Mueller, J. J. Theological Foundations. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008. Print. Holy Bible, King James Version.

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