

THIRD PART, QUESTION 38

Of the Baptism of John (In Six Articles)

We now proceed to consider the baptism wherewith Christ was baptized. And since Christ was baptized with the baptism of John, we shall consider (1) the baptism of John in general; (2) the baptizing of Christ. In regard to the former there are six points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether it was fitting that John should baptize?
- (2) Whether that baptism was from God?
- (3) Whether it conferred grace?
- (4) Whether others besides Christ should have received that baptism?
- (5) Whether that baptism should have ceased when Christ was baptized?
- (6) Whether those who received John's baptism had afterwards to receive Christ's baptism?

Whether it was fitting that John should baptize?

IIIa q. 38 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that it was not fitting that John should baptize. For every sacramental rite belongs to some law. But John did not introduce a new law. Therefore it was not fitting that he should introduce the new rite of baptism.

Objection 2. Further, John "was sent by God . . . for a witness" (Jn. 1:6,7) as a prophet; according to Lk. 1:76: "Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest." But the prophets who lived before Christ did not introduce any new rite, but persuaded men to observe the rites of the Law. as is clearly stated Malachi 4:4: "Remember the law of Moses My servant." Therefore neither should John have introduced a new rite of baptism.

Objection 3. Further, when there is too much of anything, nothing should be added to it. But the Jews observed a superfluity of baptisms; for it is written (Mk. 7:3,4) that "the Pharisees and all the Jews eat not without often washing their hands. . . and when they come from the market, unless they be washed, they eat not; and many other things there are that have been delivered to them to observe, the washings of cups and of pots, and of brazen vessels, and of beds." Therefore it was unfitting that John should baptize.

On the contrary is the authority of Scripture (Mat. 3:5,6), which, after stating the holiness of John, adds many went out to him, "and were baptized in the Jordan."

I answer that, It was fitting for John to baptize, for four reasons: first, it was necessary for Christ to be baptized by John, in order that He might sanctify baptism; as Augustine observes, *super Joan.* (Tract. xiii in Joan.).

Secondly, that Christ might be manifested. Whence John himself says (Jn. 1:31): "That He," i.e. Christ, "may be made manifest in Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water." For he announced Christ to the crowds that gathered around him; which was thus done much more

easily than if he had gone in search of each individual, as Chrysostom observes, commenting on St. John (Hom. x in Matth.).

Thirdly, that by his baptism he might accustom men to the baptism of Christ; wherefore Gregory says in a homily (Hom. vii in Evang.) that therefore did John baptize, "that, being consistent with his office of precursor, as he had preceded our Lord in birth, so he might also by baptizing precede Him who was about to baptize."

Fourthly, that by persuading men to do penance, he might prepare men to receive worthily the baptism of Christ. Wherefore Bede* says that "the baptism of John was as profitable before the baptism of Christ, as instruction in the faith profits the catechumens not yet baptized. For just as he preached penance, and foretold the baptism of Christ, and drew men to the knowledge of the Truth that hath appeared to the world, so do the ministers of the Church, after instructing men, chide them for their sins, and lastly promise them forgiveness in the baptism of Christ."

Reply to Objection 1. The baptism of John was not a sacrament properly so called [per se], but a kind of sacramental, preparatory to the baptism of Christ. Consequently, in a way, it belonged to the law of Christ, but not to the law of Moses.

Reply to Objection 2. John was not only a prophet, but "more than a prophet," as stated Mat. 11:9: for he was the term of the Law and the beginning of the Gospel. Therefore it was in his province to lead men, both by word and deed, to the law of Christ rather than to the observance of the Old Law.

Reply to Objection 3. Those baptisms of the Pharisees were vain, being ordered merely unto carnal cleanliness. But the baptism of John was ordered unto spiritual cleanliness, since it led men to do penance, as stated

* Cf. Scot. Erig. in Joan. iii, 24

above.

Whether the baptism of John was from God?

IIIa q. 38 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that the baptism of John was not from God. For nothing sacramental that is from God is named after a mere man: thus the baptism of the New Law is not named after Peter or Paul, but after Christ. But that baptism is named after John, according to Mat. 21:25: “The baptism of John... was it from heaven or from men?” Therefore the baptism of John was not from God.

Objection 2. Further, every doctrine that proceeds from God anew is confirmed by some signs: thus the Lord (Ex. 4) gave Moses the power of working signs; and it is written (Heb. 2:3,4) that our faith “having begun to be declared by the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him, God also bearing them witness by signs and wonders.” But it is written of John the Baptist (Jn. 10:41) that “John did no sign.” Therefore it seems that the baptism wherewith he baptized was not from God.

Objection 3. Further, those sacraments which are instituted by God are contained in certain precepts of Holy Scripture. But there is no precept of Holy Writ commanding the baptism of John. Therefore it seems that it was not from God.

On the contrary, It is written (Jn. 1:33): “He who sent me to baptize with water said to me: ‘He upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit,’ ” etc.

I answer that, Two things may be considered in the baptism of John—namely, the rite of baptism and the effect of baptism. The rite of baptism was not from men, but from God, who by an interior revelation of the Holy Ghost sent John to baptize. But the effect of that baptism was from man, because it effected nothing that man could not accomplish. Wherefore it was not from God alone,

except in as far as God works in man.

Reply to Objection 1. By the baptism of the New Law men are baptized inwardly by the Holy Ghost, and this is accomplished by God alone. But by the baptism of John the body alone was cleansed by the water. Wherefore it is written (Mat. 3:11): “I baptize you in water; but... He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost.” For this reason the baptism of John was named after him, because it effected nothing that he did not accomplish. But the baptism of the New Law is not named after the minister thereof, because he does not accomplish its principal effect, which is the inward cleansing.

Reply to Objection 2. The whole teaching and work of John was ordered unto Christ, who, by many miracles confirmed both His own teaching and that of John. But if John had worked signs, men would have paid equal attention to John and to Christ. Wherefore, in order that men might pay greater attention to Christ, it was not given to John to work a sign. Yet when the Jews asked him why he baptized, he confirmed his office by the authority of Scripture, saying: “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,” etc. as related, Jn. 1:23 (cf. Is. 40:3). Moreover, the very austerity of his life was a commendation of his office, because, as Chrysostom says, commenting on Matthew (Hom. x in Matth.), “it was wonderful to witness such endurance in a human body.”

Reply to Objection 3. The baptism of John was intended by God to last only for a short time, for the reasons given above (a. 1). Therefore it was not the subject of a general commandment set down in Sacred Writ, but of a certain interior revelation of the Holy Ghost, as stated above.

Whether grace was given in the baptism of John?

IIIa q. 38 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that grace was given in the baptism of John. For it is written (Mk. 1:4): “John was in the desert baptizing and preaching the baptism of penance unto remission of sins.” But penance and remission of sins are the effect of grace. Therefore the baptism of John conferred grace.

Objection 2. Further, those who were about to be baptized by John “confessed their sins,” as related Mat. 3:6 and Mk. 1:5. But the confession of sins is ordered to their remission, which is effected by grace. Therefore grace was conferred in the baptism of John.

Objection 3. Further, the baptism of John was more akin than circumcision to the baptism of Christ. But orig-

inal sin was remitted through circumcision: because, as Bede says (Hom. x in Circumcis.), “under the Law, circumcision brought the same saving aid to heal the wound of original sin as baptism is wont to bring now that grace is revealed.” Much more, therefore, did the baptism of John effect the remission of sins, which cannot be accomplished without grace.

On the contrary, It is written (Mat. 3:11): “I indeed baptize you in water unto penance.” Which words Gregory thus expounds in a certain homily (Hom. vii in Evang.): “John baptized, not in the Spirit, but in water: because he could not forgive sins.” But grace is given by the Holy Ghost, and by means thereof sins are taken away.

Therefore the baptism of John did not confer grace.

I answer that, As stated above (a. 2, ad 2), the whole teaching and work of John was in preparation for Christ: just as it is the duty of the servant and of the under-craftsman to prepare the matter for the form which is accomplished by the head-craftsman. Now grace was to be conferred on men through Christ, according to Jn. 1:17: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Therefore the baptism of John did not confer grace, but only prepared the way for grace; and this in three ways: first, by John's teaching, which led men to faith in Christ; secondly, by accustoming men to the rite of Christ's baptism; thirdly, by penance, preparing men to receive the effect of Christ's baptism.

Reply to Objection 1. In these words, as Bede says (on Mk. 1:4), a twofold baptism of penance may be understood. one is that which John conferred by baptizing, which is called "a baptism of penance," etc., by reason of its inducing men to do penance, and of its being a kind of protestation by which men avowed their purpose of doing penance. The other is the baptism of Christ, by which sins are remitted, and which John could not give, but only preach, saying: "He will baptize you in the Holy Ghost."

Or it may be said that he preached the "baptism of penance," i.e. which induced men to do penance, which penance leads men on to "the remission of sins."

Or again, it may be said with Jerome* that "by the baptism of Christ grace is given, by which sins are remitted gratis; and that what is accomplished by the bridegroom is begun by the bridesman," i.e. by John. Consequently it is said that "he baptized and preached the baptism of penance unto remission of sins," not as though he accomplished this himself, but because he began it by preparing the way for it.

Reply to Objection 2. That confession of sins was not made unto the remission of sins, to be realized immediately through the baptism of John, but to be obtained through subsequent penance and through the baptism of Christ, for which that penance was a preparation.

Reply to Objection 3. Circumcision was instituted as a remedy for original sin. Whereas the baptism of John was not instituted for this purpose, but was merely in preparation for the baptism of Christ, as stated above; whereas the sacraments attain their effect through the force of their institution.

Whether Christ alone should have been baptized with the baptism of John?

IIIa q. 38 a. 4

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ alone should have been baptized with the baptism of John. For, as stated above (a. 1), "the reason why John baptized was that Christ might receive baptism," as Augustine says (Super Joan., Tract. xiii). But what is proper to Christ should not be applicable to others. Therefore no others should have received that baptism.

Objection 2. Further, whoever is baptized either receives something from the baptism or confers something on the baptism. But no one could receive anything from the baptism of John, because thereby grace was not conferred, as stated above (a. 3). On the other hand, no one could confer anything on baptism save Christ, who "sanctified the waters by the touch of His most pure flesh"[†]. Therefore it seems that Christ alone should have been baptized with the baptism of John.

Objection 3. Further, if others were baptized with that baptism, this was only in order that they might be prepared for the baptism of Christ: and thus it would seem fitting that the baptism of John should be conferred on all, old and young, Gentile and Jew, just as the baptism of Christ. But we do not read that either children or Gentiles were baptized by the latter; for it is written (Mk. 1:5) that "there went out to him. . . all they of Jerusalem, and were baptized by him." Therefore it seems that Christ alone should have been baptized by John.

On the contrary, It is written (Lk. 3:21): "It came to pass, when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also being baptized and praying, heaven was opened."

I answer that, For two reasons it behooved others besides Christ to be baptized with the baptism of John. First, as Augustine says (Super Joan., Tract. iv, v), "if Christ alone had been baptized with the baptism of John, some would have said that John's baptism, with which Christ was baptized, was more excellent than that of Christ, with which others are baptized."

Secondly, because, as above stated, it behooved others to be prepared by John's baptism for the baptism of Christ.

Reply to Objection 1. The baptism of John was instituted not only that Christ might be baptized, but also for other reasons, as stated above (a. 1). And yet, even if it were instituted merely in order that Christ might be baptized therewith, it was still necessary for others to receive this baptism, in order to avoid the objection mentioned above.

Reply to Objection 2. Others who approached to be baptized by John could not, indeed, confer anything on his baptism: yet neither did they receive anything therefrom, save only the sign of penance.

Reply to Objection 3. This was the baptism of "penance," for which children were not suited; wherefore

* Another author on Mk. 1 (inter op. Hier.) † Mag. Sent. iv, 3

they were not baptized therewith. But to bring the nations into the way of salvation was reserved to Christ alone, who is the “expectation of the nations,” as we read Gn. 49:10. Indeed, Christ forbade the apostles to preach the

Gospel to the Gentiles before His Passion and Resurrection. Much less fitting, therefore, was it for the Gentiles to be baptized by John.

Whether John’s baptism should have ceased after Christ was baptized?

IIIa q. 38 a. 5

Objection 1. It would seem that John’s baptism should have ceased after Christ was baptized. For it is written (Jn. 1:31): “That He may be made manifest in Israel, therefore am I come baptizing in water.” But when Christ had been baptized, He was made sufficiently manifest, both by the testimony of John and by the dove coming down upon Him, and again by the voice of the Father bearing witness to Him. Therefore it seems that John’s baptism should not have endured thereafter.

Objection 2. Further, Augustine says (Super Joan., Tract. iv): “Christ was baptized, and John’s baptism ceased to avail.” Therefore it seems that, after Christ’s baptism, John should not have continued to baptize.

Objection 3. Further, John’s baptism prepared the way for Christ’s. But Christ’s baptism began as soon as He had been baptized; because “by the touch of His most pure flesh He endowed the waters with a regenerating virtue,” as Bede asserts (Mag. Sent. iv, 3). Therefore it seems that John’s baptism ceased when Christ had been baptized.

On the contrary, It is written (Jn. 3:22,23): “Jesus... came into the land of Judea... and baptized: and John also was baptizing.” But Christ did not baptize before being baptized. Therefore it seems that John continued to baptize after Christ had been baptized.

I answer that, It was not fitting for the baptism of John to cease when Christ had been baptized. First, be-

cause, as Chrysostom says (Hom. xxix in Joan.), “if John had ceased to baptize” when Christ had been baptized, “men would think that he was moved by jealousy or anger.” Secondly, if he had ceased to baptize when Christ was baptized, “he would have given His disciples a motive for yet greater envy.” Thirdly, because, by continuing to baptize, “he sent his hearers to Christ” (Hom. xxix in Joan.). Fourthly, because, as Bede* says, “there still remained a shadow of the Old Law: nor should the forerunner withdraw until the truth be made manifest.”

Reply to Objection 1. When Christ was baptized, He was not as yet fully manifested: consequently there was still need for John to continue baptizing.

Reply to Objection 2. The baptism of John ceased after Christ had been baptized, not immediately, but when the former was cast into prison. Thus Chrysostom says (Hom. xxix in Joan.): “I consider that John’s death was allowed to take place, and that Christ’s preaching began in a great measure after John had died, so that the undivided allegiance of the multitude was transferred to Christ, and there was no further motive for the divergence of opinions concerning both of them.”

Reply to Objection 3. John’s baptism prepared the way not only for Christ to be baptized, but also for others to approach to Christ’s baptism: and this did not take place as soon as Christ was baptized.

Whether those who had been baptized with John’s baptism had to be baptized with the baptism of Christ?

IIIa q. 38 a. 6

Objection 1. It would seem that those who had been baptized with John’s baptism had not to be baptized with the baptism of Christ. For John was not less than the apostles, since of him is it written (Mat. 11:11): “There hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist.” But those who were baptized by the apostles were not baptized again, but only received the imposition of hands; for it is written (Acts 8:16,17) that some were “only baptized” by Philip “in the name of the Lord Jesus”: then the apostles—namely, Peter and John—“laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost.” Therefore it seems that those who had been baptized by John had not to be baptized with the baptism of Christ.

Objection 2. Further, the apostles were baptized with John’s baptism, since some of them were his disciples, as is clear from Jn. 1:37. But the apostles do not seem to have been baptized with the baptism of Christ: for it is written (Jn. 4:2) that “Jesus did not baptize, but His disciples.” Therefore it seems that those who had been baptized with John’s baptism had not to be baptized with the baptism of Christ.

Objection 3. Further, he who is baptized is less than he who baptizes. But we are not told that John himself was baptized with the baptism of Christ. Therefore much less did those who had been baptized by John need to receive the baptism of Christ.

Objection 4. Further, it is written (Acts 19:1-5) that

* Scot. Erig. Comment. in Joan.

“Paul...found certain disciples; and he said to them: Have you received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? But they said to him: We have not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Ghost. And he said: In what then were you baptized? Who said: In John’s baptism.” Wherefore “they were” again “baptized in the name of our [Vulg.: ‘the’] Lord Jesus Christ.” Hence it seems that they needed to be baptized again, because they did not know of the Holy Ghost: as Jerome says on Joel 2:28 and in an epistle (Ixix De Viro unius uxoris), and likewise Ambrose (De Spiritu Sancto). But some were baptized with John’s baptism who had full knowledge of the Trinity. Therefore these had no need to be baptized again with Christ’s baptism.

Objection 5. Further, on Rom. 10:8, “This is the word of faith, which we preach,” the gloss of Augustine says: “Whence this virtue in the water, that it touches the body and cleanses the heart, save by the efficacy of the word, not because it is uttered, but because it is believed?” Whence it is clear that the virtue of baptism depends on faith. But the form of John’s baptism signified the faith in which we are baptized; for Paul says (Acts 19:4): “John baptized the people with the baptism of penance, saying: That they should believe in Him who was to come after him—that is to say, in Jesus.” Therefore it seems that those who had been baptized with John’s baptism had no need to be baptized again with the baptism of Christ.

On the contrary, Augustine says (Super Joan., Tract. v): “Those who were baptized with John’s baptism needed to be baptized with the baptism of our Lord.”

I answer that, According to the opinion of the Master (Sent. iv, D, 2), “those who had been baptized by John without knowing of the existence of the Holy Ghost, and who based their hopes on his baptism, were afterwards baptized with the baptism of Christ: but those who did not base their hope on John’s baptism, and who believed in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, were not baptized afterwards, but received the Holy Ghost by the imposition of hands made over them by the apostles.”

And this, indeed, is true as to the first part, and is confirmed by many authorities. But as to the second part, the assertion is altogether unreasonable. First, because John’s baptism neither conferred grace nor imprinted a character, but was merely “in water,” as he says himself (Mat. 3:11). Wherefore the faith or hope which the person baptized had in Christ could not supply this defect. Secondly, because, when in a sacrament, that is omitted which belongs of necessity to the sacrament, not only must the omission be supplied, but the whole must be entirely renewed. Now, it

belongs of necessity to Christ’s baptism that it be given not only in water, but also in the Holy Ghost, according to Jn. 3:5: “Unless a man be born of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Wherefore in the case of those who had been baptized with John’s baptism in water only, not merely had the omission to be supplied by giving them the Holy Ghost by the imposition of hands, but they had to be baptized wholly anew “in water and the Holy Ghost.”

Reply to Objection 1. As Augustine says (Super Joan., Tract. v): “After John, baptism was administered, and the reason why was because he gave not Christ’s baptism, but his own...That which Peter gave...and if any were given by Judas, that was Christ’s. And therefore if Judas baptized anyone, yet were they not rebaptized... For the baptism corresponds with him by whose authority it is given, not with him by whose ministry it is given.” For the same reason those who were baptized by the deacon Philip, who gave the baptism of Christ, were not baptized again, but received the imposition of hands by the apostles, just as those who are baptized by priests are confirmed by bishops.

Reply to Objection 2. As Augustine says to Seleucianus (Ep. cclxv), “we deem that Christ’s disciples were baptized either with John’s baptism, as some maintain, or with Christ’s baptism, which is more probable. For He would not fail to administer baptism so as to have baptized servants through whom He baptized others, since He did not fail in His humble service to wash their feet.”

Reply to Objection 3. As Chrysostom says (Hom. iv in Matth.*): “Since, when John said, ‘I ought to be baptized by Thee,’ Christ answered, ‘Suffer it to be so now’: it follows that afterwards Christ did baptize John.” Moreover, he asserts that “this is distinctly set down in some of the apocryphal books.” At any rate, it is certain, as Jerome says on Mat. 3:13, that, “as Christ was baptized in water by John, so had John to be baptized in the Spirit by Christ.”

Reply to Objection 4. The reason why these persons were baptized after being baptized by John was not only because they knew not of the Holy Ghost, but also because they had not received the baptism of Christ.

Reply to Objection 5. As Augustine says (Contra Faust. xix), our sacraments are signs of present grace, whereas the sacraments of the Old Law were signs of future grace. Wherefore the very fact that John baptized in the name of one who was to come, shows that he did not give the baptism of Christ, which is a sacrament of the New Law.

* From the supposititious *Opus Imperfectum*