

Quincy, Mayor of Boston, which was published in the *Boston Post*. After telling of the suffering of the Mormons, the letter closes with the statement, "They are dying while we are talking about them."⁸

In January, 1848, Brigham Young appointed a group of missionaries to go east to appeal for funds. Apostle Ezra T. Benson and Elder Jesse C. Little, President of the Eastern States Mission of the Church, led the group. Others were called to assist them. "Soon Elders Erastus Snow, Jesse C. Little, John E. Page, William I. Appleby, and Alexander Badlam were out collecting funds in the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Jersey, Rhode Island, etc."⁹ Colonel Kane also worked with this group. They held a meeting "in the chapel of the University, New York," and were led by the mayor of the city, William V. Brady. Again many of the leaders of the community helped,¹⁰ and the group adopted resolutions asking the citizens to help. Elders Benson and Little were in attendance to answer questions.

It appears that during the exodus of the Mormons from Nauvoo, they received a great deal of sympathy and help. One of the unanswered questions is how successful the various fund raising activities were, and how much the "poor distressed Mormons" benefited from them. This question remains largely unanswered. However, when Elder Benson returned to Council Bluffs in April, 1848, after three months in the East, he brought with him about three thousand dollars that had been collected from non-members of the Church.¹¹

Certainly not all Americans joined to help, and many felt as Captain Singleton did about the Mormons, but a great many others, including several national leaders, offered sympathy and help which was not confined just to meetings and resolutions.

⁸*Boston Post*, February 16, 1848.

⁹"Manuscript History of the Eastern States Mission," located in the L.D.S. Church Historian's Office, February 14, 1848.

¹⁰Among those active in the New York meeting was Theodore Frelinghuysen, who had been a United States Senator and Chancellor of the University of the City of New York. He had been the last Vice-presidential candidate, running with Henry Clay in 1844. He later became President of Rutgers College. Benjamin Franklin Buttler, who proposed the resolutions of help, had been Attorney-General for President Jackson.

¹¹"Manuscript History of the Eastern States Mission," *op. cit.*

THE MORMON DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM AS REFLECTED IN EARLY CHRISTIAN BAPTISTRIES

Grace Vlam

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The ordinance of baptism was known and practiced in all ages that knew the Gospel of Jesus Christ, both before and after His lifetime on earth. We find accounts of baptisms in the Pearl of Great Price¹ and in the Book of

¹Moses 6:52-53; Moses 6:64-65; Moses 7:11; Moses 8:24.



Baptistry, Grado, Italy, 4th Century A.D.

Mormon². During Jesus' lifetime in Palestine, John the Baptist was actively baptizing.³ After His resurrection, Jesus commanded His Apostles in Palestine to go out into the world to preach the Gospel and to baptize those that believed their teachings.⁴ When He appeared to the Nephites on the American Continent, He instituted the baptismal ordinance among these people and commissioned the disciples to continue this work.⁵ The accounts of baptism in the Book of Mormon caused Joseph Smith, while translating this book, to inquire after this ordinance, which resulted in his own baptism and that of his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, under the direction of the same John who had baptized Jesus.⁶

The importance of this universal ordinance lies in its saving quality. Baptism is essential for entrance into the Kingdom of God. This far-reaching effect, for the benefit of all mankind, before and after Christ, implies an unchanging ordinance, in which its meaning and its outward manifestation, i.e., mode and age performed, should remain the same at all times.

The mode and age are made very clear in modern revelations on baptism, which state that immersion in water by someone with proper authority is the proper way to baptize, and that no one should be baptized before the age of eight⁷, that being the age of accountability.

²2 Nephi 9:23; 2 Nephi 31:5; 17; Mosiah 18:8-17; Alma 16:12,14; Helaman 5:17,19; In addition, 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 records baptisms under Moses. The Doctrine and Covenants 84:26-27 tells us that the power to baptize was retained by the Israelites.

³Mark 1:5, 9-10; John 3:23.

⁴Mark 16:15-16.

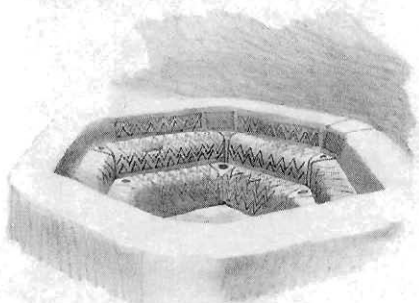
⁵3 Nephi 11:21-26.

⁶Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith 2:67-72.

⁷Doctrine and Covenants 20:72-74; 68:25-27.

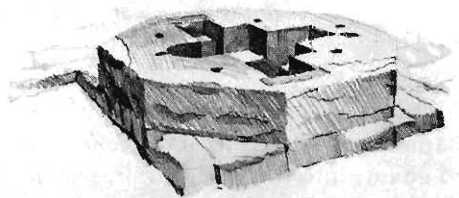
In searching for the reason why immersion is the proper mode, we come across some interesting symbolism in John. Jesus, teaching Nicodemus about baptism and its importance, likened it unto re-birth:

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.⁸



Baptismal font (hexagonal) Timgad, Algeria

Baptismal font, Sabratha, Libya, No. Africa, 5th or 6th Century.



Another meaning is available from the Apostle Paul, who likened baptism unto death, burial and resurrection. After baptism we should walk in "newness of life," he says. This newness of life harmonizes with the idea of baptism as a re-birth, as Jesus told Nicodemus. Paul also tells us that in baptism we renounce our former sinful life by crucifying the old man, in order to destroy the body of sin. Thus "the old man" dies and "a new man" is born, a symbolical act which is only accomplished by immersion in water:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.⁹

While the scriptures are explicit about the symbolical meaning of the mode of baptism (i.e., immersion), they do not tell us why we must be baptized at

⁸John 3:3-5.

⁹Romans 6:3-6.

age eight, except that at that age we become accountable before the Lord. Is this an arbitrary age, or does it have a specific significance?

That we may expect a special meaning is implied in the word of the Lord to Joseph Smith:

... that all things may have their likeness, and that they may accord one with another—that which is earthly conforming to that which is heavenly. . . .¹⁰

The same idea is also expressed in the Pearl of Great Price:

And behold all things have their likeness, and all things are created and are made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal and things which are spiritual; things which are in heaven above, and things which are on the earth. . . .¹¹

In regard to "things which are on the earth," there exists in the Mediterranean world a large number of relatively small buildings in which baptisms were performed. Among these baptistries, which were built from the fourth century on, there is a number which are octagonal in shape. Often they have an octagonal font, generally large enough for immersion, which stands in the center of the building. On the octagonal parapet of the font, eight columns support a baldachin. In other baptistries the font is sunken into the floor with steps leading down.

Could there be a connection between the octagonal shape of the baptistry and its font with age eight of baptism? Perhaps a look at the origin and development of the Early Christian baptistry may shed some light on the question.

The existence of baptistries is not recorded in the scriptures.¹² In "scriptural times," baptism was performed in places "where there was much water," such as rivers and lakes, as we learn from the recorded activities of John the Baptist at the rivers Jordan and Susquehanna,¹³ as well as those of Paul,¹⁴ Philip,¹⁵ and Alma.¹⁶

Before Emperor Constantine the Great (274-337), Christianity was a persecuted religion, and little building activity took place. Christians met in private houses, where, very likely, baptisms were performed (when the political climate forbade the performance in the open).

Such a house-church, complete with baptistry, has been discovered at Dura-Europos on the Euphrates. This baptistry, in the rectangular shape of a room, is the earliest of its kind found so far in the old world—circa A.D. 232—and it

¹⁰Doctrine and Covenants 128:13.

¹¹Moses 6:63.

¹²Except where baptism for the dead is spoken of. See Doctrine and Covenants 124:29-33. See also I Kings 7:23-26 and II Chronicles 4:2-5 which speak of the "molten sea," which may have been a baptismal font in Solomon's Temple. A similar font, still in existence, is found in St. Bartholomew's Church in Liege, Belgium, of ca. 1110, which, like Solomon's example and present-day Mormon temple fonts, rests on the back of twelve oxen. It is unique in the world, although the Lion Fountain in the Alhambra at Granada, Spain, may be related in symbolism, since the basin of the fountain rests on the back of twelve lions. The fountain dates from the 14th century.

¹³Mark 1:5; Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith 2:67-72.

¹⁴Acts 16:12-15.

¹⁵Acts 8:38.

¹⁶Mosiah 18:8.

is the only room in the house-church adorned with paintings. One of the paintings visually links baptism with resurrection: a large white sarcophagus is approached by the three Marys, who hold torches and vases with ointments in their hands.¹⁷

This representation of the morning of the resurrection of Christ in the baptistry illustrates Paul's symbolism of baptism, a relationship which is further established by the fact that from a very early date on, baptism was performed on the eve of Easter.

With the Edict of Milan in 313, Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire. This newly-won freedom made it possible for the Christians to start a large building program. But at the beginning of the fourth century the Christians had not yet been in a position to develop a building style and tradition of their own. Therefore they began by taking over existing Roman buildings, or modeling their buildings on Roman examples, at the same time giving the building a new "Christian" meaning or content. In this respect it is highly significant that the building form for the Christian baptistry was taken from the model of Roman mausolea (buildings meant for the burial of emperors or wealthy citizens).¹⁸

This choice was not accidental; there exists a close linkage between mausolea and baptistries, both in content and pattern. The symbolism of immersion is that of death, burials, and resurrection, which coincides closely with the function of a mausoleum. Therefore it must have been "perfectly natural to any Early Christian believer to use the pattern of a mausoleum for an edifice in which his old sinful Adam was to die and where he was to be buried with Christ so that he might be resurrected with Him."¹⁹

Roman mausolea were generally either round or octagonal in shape. Examples of the former are the Mausoleum of Cecilia Metella on the Via Appia, the Mausoleum of St. Helena in Rome, and the Mausoleum of Emperor Galerius, now the Church of St. George, at Salonika. The best preserved example of an octagonal mausoleum is the one in the elaborate palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Split.

In the Constantinian Age, baptistries generally followed the round mausoleum pattern. This is exemplified by the Mausoleum of St. Costanza in Rome, which some scholars believe was originally intended as a baptistry,²⁰ and by

¹⁷The baptistry could not be restored *in situ*, but it has been reconstructed in the Yale Fine Arts Gallery. See M. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and its Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. 100ff.

¹⁸Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Medieval Architecture,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, V, 1942, 22-23. Krautheimer also brings in the Roman bath house as a possible derivative for the Christian baptistry. I personally do not accept this, since it lacks all the symbolical links that make the mausoleum so important in this respect.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁰See O. K. Wulff, *Altchristliche und Byzantinische Kunst* (II; Berlin-Neubabelsberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion m.b.h., 1914), I, p. 247 and W. F. Volbach, *Frühchristliche Kunst: die Kunst der Spätantike in West- und Ostrom* (München; Hirmer Verlag, 1958), p. 5. The seeming interchangeableness of baptistry and mausoleum is further emphasized by the custom of burying people in the baptistry, while it continued to function as such. Tombs were placed in the Arian Baptistry at Ravenna, and although the Council of Auxerre in 578 prohibited burials in baptistries, the custom continued as late as 1419, when Pope John XXII was buried in the baptistry of Florence. See Krautheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 28ff. In order to visit the baptistry at Grado one must pass four Roman sarcophagi which lead the way to the baptistry's entrance.

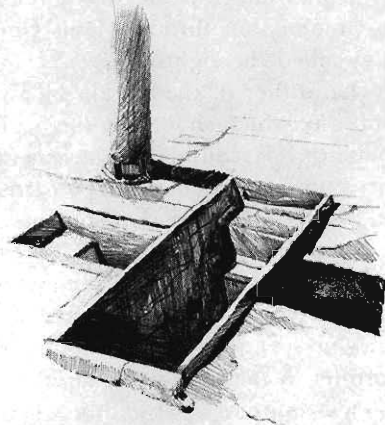
the baptistry at Nocera, which some date as early as 350, while others place it in the fifth century.²¹ It was also the pattern of Constantine's baptistry near the Lateran in Rome, which has been superseded by a fifth century octagonal structure built by Pope Sixtus III and recently restored.

Towards the end of the fourth century a standardization of building pattern begins to take place, spreading from the great ecclesiastical and architectural centers of Rome, Milan, and Constantinople, to the provinces. In northern Italy, southern France, and on the Dalmatian Coast, all areas under the influence of Milan, an octagonal baptistry plan becomes the standard form. The font may or may not conform to the octagon; some fonts are hexagonal or round, or round on the outside and octagonal on the inside. Whatever the combination pattern, the number eight is always in some way represented in the baptistry.

In 373, Milan became the seat of St. Ambrose, and this influential Church Father is credited with the building of the church and baptistry of St. Thecla. Neither building exists today, but excavations have shown that the baptistry was octagonal in form and had an octagonal font.²²



Baptismal font, Sbeitla, Tunisia, 5th Century A.D.



Baptismal font (cruciform), Bulla Regia, Tunisia

Similarly shaped baptistries are still in existence at Albenga (Italy), Fréjus, Aix-en-Provence, Riez (all in southern France), Grado (Italy), Salona (excavated in Yugoslavia), and Tabarka (Tunisia). Ravenna has two baptistries, one for the Orthodox community, the other for the Arians.

The baptistry of St. Thecla had an important feature, which was also applied in the Lateran baptistry in Rome. Eight verses were inscribed around the font, which have been preserved in the *Sylloge Laureshamensis*, a manuscript

²¹The date of 350 is given by Sir Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956). Wulff, *op. cit.*, places the baptistry also in the fourth century, while Krautheimer, *op. cit.*, favors the fifth or sixth century.

²²A. Khatchaturian, *Les Baptistères paléochrétiens* (Paris, 1962), fig. 329.

This eighth age is truly “the age of accountability” spoken of in the Doctrine and Covenants,³⁰ and does not only refer to the actual eight years of a person’s life, when he should be baptized, but also to the age following the Millennium. Is it not plausible then that the reason for being baptized at age eight lies in the significant symbolism of that number, which, like the symbolism of immersion, reflects resurrection and newness of life?

That eight is the symbol of salvation through baptism and the resurrection is even mentioned in I Peter 3:20-21:

... when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure [i.e., the number eight] whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . .

Perhaps this is a biblical reference to the fact that people should be baptized at age eight.



Baptistry, Rome, Italy, 4th or 5th Century

Traces of the doctrine of baptism for the dead, a doctrine restored in Mormon revelation, can also be found in the architecture of early Christian baptistries.

I have mentioned earlier that not always were baptismal fonts octagonally shaped. The hexagon, the circle and the cruciform are often employed. Examples of these are particularly plentiful in North Africa, at Sabratha, Carthage, Bulla Regia, Tipasa, Djemila and Timgad, and in most cases the font is sunken below the floor of the baptistry.

The meaning of the cruciform font derives from the cross and the crucifixion of Christ, which took place on the sixth day. On the sixth day the Lord also created Adam. The hexagon symbolizes the sixth day and is thus, with the cruciform, very suitable for use in baptistries, because of baptism’s association with the death of Christ and with the burial of the “old Adam,” who has been crucified with Christ in baptism.

³⁰Doctrine and Covenants 18:42; 20:71.

The meaning of the sunken font becomes clear when we study the place where baptism for the dead is performed. In revealing anew this ordinance, the Lord declared that the baptismal font for this ordinance must be in “. . . similitude of the grave,” and “be in a place underneath . . .”³¹ The early-day Saints practiced baptism for the dead³² and they must have had a special place to do this. It is likely that they too were commanded to build a font “in a place underneath.”

This ordinance was still practiced by the Marcionites, a Christian sect, in the third century.³³ Further evidences are that at Carthage (Tunisia) two underground baptistries have been found, and that in 397 a Council of Carthage forbade any further practice of baptism for the dead. Most of the baptistries with sunken fonts date from the fifth and sixth centuries and whether they have been actually used for baptisms for the dead is very doubtful, but they reflect the Lord’s specification of the “similitude of the grave” and the placement “underneath.”

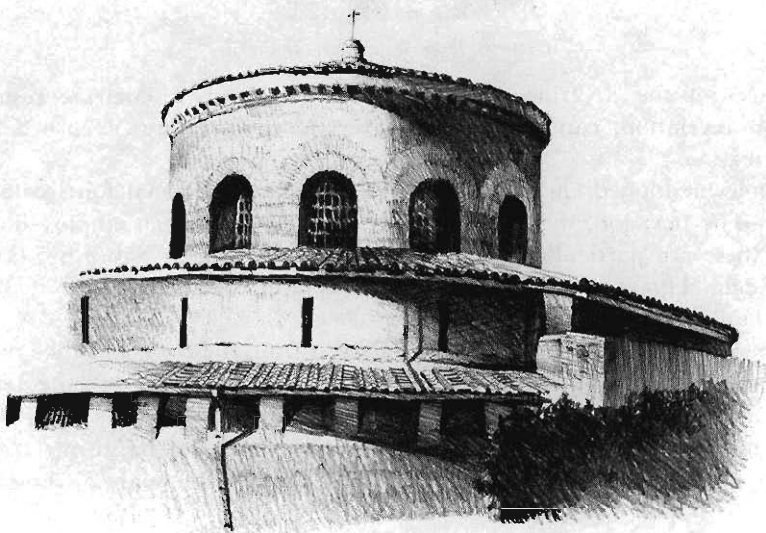
Although baptism by immersion, either for the living or the dead, was replaced by pouring or sprinkling, and age eight was changed to infant baptism, thereby destroying the significant symbolism that was attached to both mode and age, this symbolism was clearly transferred to the architecture of a large number of baptistries from the latter part of the fourth century on.

It is the author’s opinion that the octagonal baptistries with their octagonal, hexagonal, cruciform, and sunken fonts reflect the true teachings of the Gospel pertaining to baptism, as they were known among the early-day Saints and newly revealed to Joseph Smith in this last dispensation.

³¹Doctrine and Covenants 128:13.

³²1 Corinthians 15:29.

³³Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950), II, p. 674.



S. Costanza, Rome circa 350 A.D.

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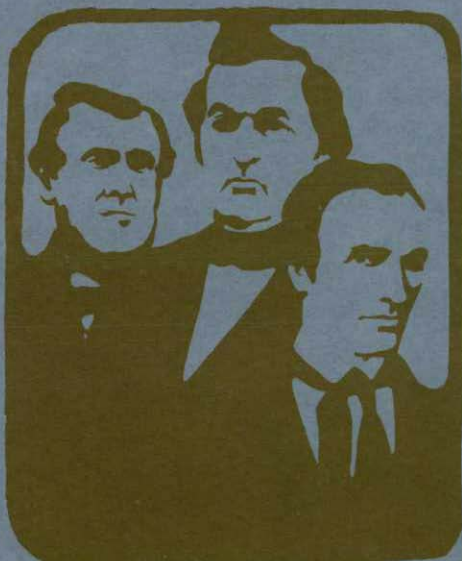
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