

QUESTION 38

John's Baptizing in General

Next we have to consider the baptism with which Christ was baptized. And because Christ was baptized with the baptism of John, we have to consider, first, John's baptism in general (question 38) and, second, his baptizing of Christ (question 39).

On the first topic there are six questions: (1) Was it fitting for John to baptize? (2) Was this baptizing from God? (3) Did this baptism confer grace? (4) Was it fitting for others besides Christ to be baptized with this baptism? (5) Should this baptism have ceased once Christ was baptized? (6) Did those who were baptized with John's baptism have to be baptized later with Christ's baptism?

Article 1

Was it fitting for John to baptize?

It seems that it was not fitting for John to baptize (*non fuerit conveniens Ioannem baptizare*):

Objection 1: Every sacramental rite belongs to some law. But John did not introduce a new law. Therefore, it was not fitting for him to introduce a new rite of baptizing.

Objection 2: John "was sent by God to give witness as a prophet" (John 1:6-7)—this according to Luke 1:76 ("You, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High"). But as is clear from Malachi 4:4 ("Remember the Law of Moses my servant"), the prophets who existed before Christ did not introduce a new rite, but instead encouraged the observance of the rites of the Law. Therefore, neither should John have introduced a new rite of baptizing.

Objection 3: Where there is more than enough of a given thing, one should not add anything to it. But the Jews were excessive in their abundance of washings (*excedebant in superfluitate baptismatum*); for Mark 7:3-4 says, "The Pharisees—and, in fact, all Jews—do not eat without repeatedly washing their hands ... and when they come from the market, they do not eat unless they have washed themselves, and there are many other things that have been handed down to them to observe: the washing of cups and of pots and of bronze vessels, and of beds." Therefore, it was not fitting for John to baptize.

But contrary to this is the authority of Scripture in Matthew 3:5-6, where, after John's holiness has been noted, it is added, "Many went out to him and were baptized in the Jordan."

I respond: It was fitting for John to baptize, and this for four reasons:

First of all, because, as Augustine explains in *Super Ioannem*, Christ had to be baptized by John in order to consecrate baptism.

Second, in order that Christ might be made manifest. Hence, in John 1:31 John says, "So that He"—viz., Christ—"might be made manifest in Israel, for this reason I have come baptizing with water." For as Chrysostom points out in *Super Ioannem*, John announced Christ to the crowds that gathered around him, and it was much easier to do it this way than if he had gone from one individual to another.

Third, in order that by his own baptizing John might get men ready for Christ's baptism. Hence, in a homily Gregory explains that the reason why John baptized "was that, preserving the order involved in being a precursor, John, who had come ahead of time by being born before our Lord was to be born, likewise came ahead of time by baptizing before the One who would be baptizing."

Fourth, in order that, by leading men to repentance, he might get them used to worthily receiving Christ's baptism. Hence, Bede says, "John's baptism was as profitable before Christ's baptism as instruction in the faith is profitable for catechumens who are not yet baptized. For just as John preached repentance, foretold Christ's baptism, and drew men to the knowledge of the truth that had appeared to the world, so it is with the Church's ministers, who first instruct men and then convict them of their sins

and, lastly, promise them forgiveness in Christ's baptism."

Reply to objection 1: John's baptizing was not a sacrament in its own right (*non erat per se sacramentum*), but was instead a sort of sacramental that disposed one for Christ's baptizing. And so it belonged in a certain way to the Law of Christ, even though it did not belong to the Law of Moses.

Reply to objection 2: John was not only a prophet, "but something more than a prophet," as Matthew 11:9 says; for he came along at the end of the Law and the beginning of the Gospel. And so his role was more to lead men by his word and deed to the Law of Christ rather than to the observance of the Old Law.

Reply to objection 3: These sorts of washing by the Pharisees were empty (*baptismata illa Pharisaeorum erant inania*), since they were ordered only toward the cleanness of the flesh. By contrast, John's baptizing was ordered toward spiritual cleanness; for as has been explained, it led men to repentance.

Article 2

Was John's baptizing from God?

It seems that John's baptizing was not from God (*baptismus Ioannis non fuit a Deo*):

Objection 1: Nothing sacramental that is from God takes its name from a mere man; for instance, baptism under the New Law is called Christ's baptism and not Peter's baptism or Paul's baptism. But the baptism in question takes its name from John—this according to Matthew 21:25 ("Was John's baptism from heaven? Or from men?"). Therefore, John's baptizing was not from God.

Objection 2: Every teaching that proceeds anew (*de novo*) from God is confirmed by certain signs; hence, in Exodus 4, the Lord gave Moses the power to work miracles, and Hebrews 2:3-4 says that when our Faith "had begun to be enunciated by our Lord, it was confirmed in us by those who heard Him, with God also testifying by signs and wonders." But in John 10:41 it is said of John the Baptist, "John worked no signs." Therefore, it seems that the baptism with which John baptized was not from God.

Objection 3: Sacraments that are divinely instituted are contained in certain precepts belonging to Sacred Scripture. But John's baptizing is not commanded by any precept of Sacred Scripture. Therefore, it seems that it was not from God.

But contrary to this: In John 1:33 [John the Baptist] says, "He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He upon whom you will see the Spirit descending, etc.'"

I respond: In the case of John's baptizing there are two things that can be considered, viz., (a) the rite itself of baptizing and (b) the effect of the baptizing.

The *rite of baptizing* was not from men but was instead from God, who by an interior revelation of the Holy Spirit sent John to baptize.

On the other hand, the *effect of his baptizing* was from man, since there was nothing effected by his baptism that a man was not able to do. Hence, the effect was not from God alone except to the extent that God operates in a man.

Reply to objection 1: Through the baptism of the New Law men are baptized *interiorly* by the Holy Spirit, and this is something that God alone does. By contrast, through John's baptism *the body alone* was washed with water. Hence, in Matthew 3:11 [John says], "I baptize you with water; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." And the reason why John's baptism takes its name from him is that nothing was done in it which he himself did not do. By contrast, the baptism of the New Law does not take its name from its minister, who does not bring about the principal effect of baptism, viz., the interior cleansing.

Reply to objection 2: John's entire teaching and acting was ordered toward Christ, who confirmed both His own teaching and John's teaching by a multitude of signs. However, if John had performed signs, men would have paid equal attention to John and to Christ. And so, in order that men might pay attention mainly to Christ, it was not given to John to perform signs.

Yet to those Jews who asked him why he was baptizing, he confirmed his own role by the authority of Scripture, saying, "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, etc." (John 1:19ff. quoting Isaiah 40:3). Again, the very austerity of his life commended his role, since, as Chrysostom explains in *Super Matthaeum*, "It was remarkable to see such endurance in a human body."

Reply to objection 3: For the reasons explained above, John's baptizing was ordained by God to last for only a short time. And so it was not commended by any precept that was handed down in general in Sacred Scripture; instead, as has been explained, it was commended through a certain interior revelation by the Holy Spirit.

Article 3

Was grace given in John's baptism?

It seems that grace was given in John's baptism (*in baptismo Ioannis gratia daretur*):

Objection 1: Mark 1:4 says, "John was in the desert baptizing and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." But repentance and the forgiveness of sins come through grace. Therefore, John's baptism conferred grace.

Objection 2: As Matthew 3:6 and Mark 1:5 report, those about to be baptized by John confessed their sins. But the confession of sins is ordered toward forgiveness, which is effected by grace. Therefore, grace was conferred in John's baptism.

Objection 3: John's baptism was closer to Christ's baptism than circumcision was. But original sin was remitted by circumcision, since, as Bede says, "Circumcision under the Law effected the same grace of a salvific cure for the wound of original sin (*idem salutiferae curationis auxilium contra peccati vulnus*) that baptism is wont to effect now that grace has been revealed." Therefore, *a fortiori*, John's baptism effected the forgiveness of sin—which cannot be done without grace.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 3:11 John says, "I baptize you with water unto repentance." Explaining this in a homily, Gregory says, "John baptizes not with the Spirit but with water, since he was not able to forgive sins." But grace is from the Holy Spirit, and it is through grace that sins are taken away. Therefore, John's baptism did not confer grace.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 2), John's entire teaching and action was a preparation for Christ, in the way that attendants and lower-ranking craftsmen have the role of preparing the matter for the form, which is induced by the principal craftsman.

Now grace has to be conferred on men through Christ—this according to John 1:17 ("Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"). And so John's baptism did not confer grace but instead was only a preparation for grace, and this in three ways: in one way, by John's teaching, which led men toward faith in Christ; in a second way, by getting men used to the rite of Christ's baptism; in a third way, through repentance, by preparing men to receive the effect of Christ's baptism.

Reply to objection 1: In these words of Bede's, two sorts of baptism of repentance can be understood. One of them, which John conferred by baptizing and which is called a "baptism of repentance, etc." because that baptism was a sort of inducement to repentance and, as it were, a declaration by which men professed that they were going to do penance. The second, on the other hand, is Christ's baptism, through which their sins are forgiven and which John was unable to give; instead, he

only foretold it by saying, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:8).

An alternative reply is that (a) John preached a baptism of repentance, i.e., a baptism leading to repentance, and that (b) this repentance leads men to the remission of their sins.

Another alternative reply is that, as Jerome puts it, “Through Christ’s baptism grace is given by which sins are remitted gratuitously, and what is brought to completion by the bridegroom is initiated by the groomsman,” i.e., by John. Hence, it is said that “he baptized and preached the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins”—not in the sense that he accomplished this himself, but in the sense that he initiated it by way of preparing men for it.”

Reply to objection 2: The confession of sins in question did not lead to the remission of sins being delivered up immediately through John’s baptism. Instead, it led to the remission of sins through a later repentance and Christ’s baptism, for which that [first act of] repentance was a preparation.

Reply to objection 3: Circumcision had been instituted as a remedy for original sin. John’s baptism, however, had not been instituted for this, but, as has been explained, was only a preparation for Christ’s baptism. Now sacraments have their effect by the force of their institution.

Article 4

Should Christ alone have been baptized with John’s baptism?

It seems that Christ alone should have been baptized with John's baptism (*baptismo Ioannis solus Christus debebat baptizari*):

Objection 1: It was explained above (a. 1) that, as Augustine puts it in *Super Ioannem*, “John baptized in order that Christ might be baptized.” But what is proper to Christ should not belong to others. Therefore, it was not fitting for anyone else to be baptized with that baptism.

Objection 2: If an individual is baptized, either he receives something from the baptism or he confers something on the baptism. But no one was able to receive anything from John’s baptism, since, as has been explained (a. 3), grace was not conferred by it. Nor was anyone able to confer anything on this baptism except Christ, who sanctified the waters by the touch of His most pure flesh. Therefore, it seems that Christ alone should have been baptized with John’s baptism.

Objection 3: If anyone else was baptized with [John’s] baptism, this was only in order that he might be prepared for Christ’s baptism, and so it would seem fitting that just as Christ’s baptism is conferred on everyone, both the great and the small, both gentiles and Jews, John’s baptism, too, would be conferred in the same way. But we do not read that he baptized children or, again, gentiles; for Mark 1:5 says, “All the inhabitants of Jerusalem went out to him and were baptized by him.” Therefore, it seems that Christ alone should have been baptized by John.

But contrary to this: Luke 3:21 says, “It came to pass that when all the people were baptized, Jesus also having been baptized and being in prayer, the heavens were opened ...”

I respond: There are two reasons why it was necessary for individuals other than Christ to be baptized with John’s baptism:

First, because, as Augustine explains in *Super Ioannem*, “If only Christ had been baptized with John’s baptism, there would have been no shortage of individuals claiming that John’s baptism, with which Christ was baptized, was worth more than Christ’s baptism, with which others are being baptized.”

Second, because, as has been explained (aa. 1 and 3), it was necessary for others to be prepared for Christ’s baptism by means of John’s baptism.

Reply to objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), John’s baptizing was instituted not only in order that Christ might be baptized, but for other reasons as well. Still, even if it had been instituted

solely in order for Christ to be baptized with it, it was necessary to avoid the problem noted above by having others baptized with this baptism.

Reply to objection 2: The others who came for John's baptism were, to be sure, unable to confer anything on the baptism; nor, again, did they receive grace from the baptism. Instead, all that they received was a sign of repentance.

Reply to objection 3: John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, which is not appropriate for children, and that is why children were not baptized with that baptism. Again, conferring a way to salvation on the gentiles was reserved just to Christ, who is "the expectation of the nations," as Genesis 49:10 puts it. But even Christ himself kept His apostles from preaching the Gospel to the gentiles before His passion and resurrection. Hence, it was all the less fitting for gentiles to be allowed to be baptized by John.

Article 5

Should John's baptism have stopped after Christ was baptized?

It seems that John's baptism should have stopped after Christ was baptized (*baptismus Ioannis cessare debuerit postquam Christus est baptizatus*):

Objection 1: John 1:31 says, "I have come baptizing with water in order that He might be made manifest to Israel." But once Christ was baptized, He had been made sufficiently manifest to Israel (a) by John's testimony, (b) by the descent of the dove, and also (c) by the testimony of the Father's voice. Therefore, it does not seem that John's baptism should have continued afterwards.

Objection 2: In *Super Ioannem* Augustine says, "Christ was baptized and John's baptizing stopped." Therefore, it seems that after Christ was baptized, it was not fitting for John to baptize.

Objection 3: John's baptism was a preparation for Christ's baptism. But Christ's baptizing began immediately upon Christ's being baptized, since, as Bede says, "By the touch of His most pure flesh He conferred on the waters the power to regenerate." Therefore, it seems that once Christ was baptized, John's baptism stopped.

But contrary to this: John 3:22-23 says, "Jesus came into the land of Judah and was baptizing, and John was also baptizing." But Christ did not baptize before He had been baptized. Therefore, it seems that John was still baptizing after Christ was baptized.

I respond: It was not fitting for John's baptizing to stop once Christ had been baptized:

First of all, because, as Chrysostom explains in *Super Ioannem*, "if John's baptizing had stopped" once Christ had been baptized, "it would have been thought that John was acting out of jealousy or anger." Second, because if he had stopped baptizing while Christ was baptizing, John "would have driven his own disciples to greater jealousy." Third, because as long as he persisted in his baptizing, "he was sending his hearers to Christ."

Fourth, because, as Bede explains, "a shadow of the Old Law still remained, and a precursor should not withdraw until the truth is made [fully] manifest."

Reply to objection 1: Christ was not yet fully manifest once He had been baptized. And so it was still necessary for John to baptize.

Reply to objection 2: After Christ was baptized, John's baptizing did stop—yet not immediately, but after he had been imprisoned. Hence, in *Super Ioannem* Chrysostom says, "I think that the reason why John's death was permitted, and why Christ's preaching began to a great extent after John had been removed, was in order that (a) the undivided affection of the multitude might pass on to Christ, and that (b) [the people] would no longer be divided by their opinions about the two of them."

Reply to objection 3: John’s baptizing was preparatory not only with respect to Christ’s being baptized, but also with respect to others coming to Christ’s baptizing. The latter was not yet fulfilled when Christ was baptized.

Article 6

Did those who had been baptized with John’s baptism have to be baptized with Christ’s baptism?

It seems that those who had been baptized with John’s baptism did not have to be baptized with Christ’s baptism (*baptizati baptismo Ioannis non fuerint baptizandi baptismo Christi*):

Objection 1: John was not lesser than the apostles, since Matthew 11:11 says of him, “Among those born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist.” But those who were baptized by the apostles were not baptized again; instead, all that was added was the imposition of hands on them. For as Acts 8:16-17 reports, there were some individuals “who had been baptized [by Philip] only in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and then the apostles, viz., Peter and John, “imposed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, it seems that those baptized by John did not have to be baptized with Christ’s baptism.

Objection 2: The apostles were baptized with John’s baptism, since, as is clear from John 1:37, some of them were among John’s disciples. But the apostles do not seem to have been baptized with Christ’s baptism; for John 4:2 says, “It was not Jesus who was baptizing, but His disciples.” Therefore, it seems that those baptized with John’s baptism did not have to be baptized with Christ’s baptism.

Objection 3: The one who is baptized is lesser than the one who baptizes. But we do not read that John himself was baptized with Christ’s baptism. Therefore, *a fortiori*, those who were baptized by John did not need to be baptized with Christ’s baptism.

Objection 4: Acts 19:1-5 says, “Paul found certain of the disciples and said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?’ They replied to him, ‘We have not even heard of the Holy Spirit.’ He asked, ‘How then were you baptized?’ They replied, ‘With John’s baptism’ ... They were baptized again in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” So, then, as Jerome claims in *Super Iolem* and in the letter *De Viro Unius Uxoris*, and as Ambrose claims in *De Spiritu Sancto*, it seems that because they did not know of the Holy Spirit, it was necessary for them to be baptized again. But there were some individuals baptized with John’s baptism who had full knowledge of the Trinity. Therefore, those individuals did not have to be baptized again with Christ’s baptism.

Objection 5: A Gloss of Augustine’s on Romans 10:8 (“This is the word of faith that we preach”) says, “Where does this power of water to touch the body and cleanse the heart come from, except from the word that effects it? Not because the word is uttered, but because it is believed.” From this it is clear that the power of baptism depends on faith. But the form of John’s baptism signified the faith in which we are baptized; for in Acts 19:4 Paul says, “John baptized the people with the baptism of repentance, telling them to 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 did not have to be baptized again with Christ’s baptism.

But contrary to this: In *Super Ioannem* Augustine says, “It was necessary for those who had been baptized with John’s baptism to be baptized with our Lord’s baptism.”

I respond: According to the opinion of the Master in *Sentences* 4, “In the case of those who were baptized by John without knowing the Holy Spirit and placing their hope in John’s baptism, they were later baptized with Christ’s baptism, whereas in the case of those who did not place their hope in John’s

baptism and who believed in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, they were not baptized later on, but instead received the Holy Spirit by an imposition of hands on them that was performed by the apostles.”

And, to be sure, this opinion is true with respect to its first part—something that is confirmed by many authorities.

However, as regards the second part, what is said is entirely unreasonable:

First, because John’s baptism neither conferred grace nor imprinted a [sacramental] character, but was instead merely a baptism “with water,” as he himself says in Matthew 3:11. Hence, neither the faith nor the hope that belonged to a baptized individual could make up for this deficiency.

Second, because when what is necessary in a sacrament is omitted in the sacrament, not only is it necessary for what was omitted to be supplied, but the sacrament has to be totally renewed. But it is necessary for Christ’s baptism to be effected not only in water but also in the Holy Spirit—this according to John 3:5 (“Unless a man be reborn from water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”).

Hence, in the case of those who were baptized only in water with John’s baptism, not only did what was lacking have to be supplied—so that, namely, they were given the Holy Spirit through the imposition of hands—but they had to be totally baptized again in water and the Holy Spirit.

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine explains in *Super Ioannem*, “The reason why baptism was given after John was that he gave his own baptism and not Christ’s. Christ’s baptism was given by Peter, and if any type of baptism was given by Judas, it was Christ’s. And this is why if Judas baptized any individuals, they did not have to be baptized again. For the baptism takes its type from the one *in whose power* it is given, and not from the one *by whose ministry* it is given.” And this is also why those who were baptized by the deacon Philip, who gave Christ’s baptism, were not baptized again, but instead received an imposition of hands from the apostles—in the way that those baptized by priests receive [the sacrament of] confirmation from bishops (*sicut baptizati per sacerdotes confirmantur per episcopos*).

Reply to objection 2: As Augustine says in *Ad Seleucianum*, “We take it for granted that Christ’s disciples were baptized either (a) with John’s baptism, as some think or (b), as is more credible, with Christ’s baptism. For He, who did not fall short in the ministry of humility when he washed their feet, would not fall short in the ministry of baptism, in order that He might possess baptized servants through whom He would baptize others.”

Reply to objection 3: As Chrysostom says in *Super Matthaëum*, “By the fact that when John said, ‘It is I that should be baptized by you’, Christ responded, ‘Let it be so for now’ (Matthew 3:14-15), it is shown that afterwards Christ baptized John.” And he asserts that “this written down explicitly in certain apocryphal books.”

In any case, it is certain that, as Jerome says in *Super Matthaëum*, “Just as Christ was baptized in water by John, so John was going to be baptized by Christ in the Spirit.”

Reply to objection 4: The whole reason why the individuals in question were baptized after John’s baptism was not that they did not know of the Holy Spirit, but that they had not been baptized with Christ’s baptism.

Reply to objection 5: As Augustine explains in *Contra Faustum*, our sacraments are signs of present grace, whereas the sacraments of the Old Law were signs of future grace. Hence, by the very fact that John baptized in the name of the one who was to come, we are given to understand that he did not give Christ’s baptism, which is a sacrament of the New Law.