Baptism in early Christianity: A critical investigation of relevant Christian writings (80 – 325 A.D.)

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To my grandfather
Ferdinando Tarquini
whose memory is always alive in all those who knew him and loved him.
ABSTRACT

This research project deals with the practice of the baptism in the early church and thus during the time of the origins of Christianity. Its main interest is to offer a substantiated answer to the following question: did the first generations of Christians baptize infants? The study dealt in-depth with this question. It is answered in terms of a thorough and accurate investigation of recognized and accepted translations of primary sources.

The study comprises six chapters. The first chapter offers an introduction to the research and outlines the sources as well as the method employed in analyzing the early Christian literature. Chapter two entails an overview of New Testament information related to baptism and infant baptism. The New Testament is obviously the most fundamental document on the issue and provides useful indications on what was practiced in the early churches concerning the baptism of infants and children.

The following chapter (third) investigates the primary historical documents dated between 80 and 200 A.D. and covers thus (infant) baptism during the second century. These include the Didaché or the teaching of the twelve apostles (80-100 A.D.), the Letter of Barnabas (unknown - 61 A.D.), Shepherd of Hermas (unknown - 140/155 A.D.), Ignatius of Antioch (35-110 A.D.), Justin Martyr (100 – 165 A.D.) and Irenaeus of Lyons (130 - 200 A.D.).

Chapter four – Differentiated views and the incorporation of children at the beginning of the third century - focuses on historical documents from 200-250 A.D. These include: Tertullian (160-240
A.D.), Hippolytus of Rome (170 - 235 A.D.) and Origen (183/186 – 253 A.D).

Chapter five – Synodical decrees on the baptism of children until the Council of Nicaea (325) – offers an exposition of documents dated from 220-325 A.D. These encapsulate the views of Cyprian of Carthage (210-258 A.D.), the Synod of Elvira (306/312 A.D.), the Synod of Neo-Caesarea (314/325 A.D.) and the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.).

The ultimate chapter entails a substantiated conclusion to the study. In final analysis the research indicated that there are no proven evidences that enables us to affirm with certainty that pedo-baptism was the norm or, in any case, that it was in use from the very beginning of the Christian church.

KEY WORDS
Baptism, Council of Nicaea, Early Christianity, Infant Baptism, Preparation for Baptism.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ established visible ordinances in his church. Since we can define an ordinance as a predetermined practice or ceremony, we can speak of two visible ordinances,\(^1\) namely, water baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Rodman, III, 2009:273-274). Baptism is thus an order instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16). Water is the means of baptism\(^2\) (Ricca, 2015:48), administered in the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19-20; Ac. 8:38). It represents the symbol and insignia of communion with Christ in his death and in his resurrection. Baptism bears witness of being implanted in Christ (Rm. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27) and of having received the remission of sin by Christ (Mk. 1:4; Ac. 22:16) (Bolognesi, 2007:78-79). Moreover, baptism speaks of surrendering oneself to God through Jesus Christ and to walk in newness of life (Rm. 6:2-4). Therefore, baptism is an act of testimony, faith, commitment and obedience.

However, obedience to this command divided the global Christian community in two distinct trajectories of thinking: between those who inclusively practice infant baptism and those who exclusively practice adult baptism (Ricca, 2015:9). The inclusive point of view corresponds with a typical theological understanding of the

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1 Rodman (2009:273): «The term “sacraments” is what is traditionally used in reference to these ordinances, so we could also talk about the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. However, since Jesus Christ expressly ordained the Lord’s Baptism and Supper, the term ordinances seems more appropriate».

2 «The New Testament doesn’t give precise instruction of the modality of water baptism. Although, the original word baptismo means “to immerse”, “dive in”, and therefore the idea the verb suggests is that of a full immersion in the water». 
Abraham and other Old Testament covenants, as well as the rise of a sacramental theology since Augustine (Ferrario, 2008:112-113). This sacramental theology provided in its baptismal doctrine for the absolution, not only for sins committed before conversion, but also of original sin. This elevated baptism, and therefore infant baptism, to a monopoly in salvation itself (Ferrario, 2008:113; see also McGrath, 1999:517).

This division in Christianity on baptism confronts the global church not only with its development in the history of theology, but in particular with its origins in Christian communities and intellectual thinking. To trace the earliest trajectories in this regard, promises a significant perspective on the issue. Based on the earliest primary sources, this study intents to demarcate such a meaningful perspective on the matter.

1.1 Problem statement

Scholarship, on the one hand, indicates that New-testamentary and early Christian literature do not testify to the practice of infant baptism until the first clear written evidence surfaced in the writings of Tertullian at about 200 A.D. Before that, baptism was limited to those that confessed their belief. Those who embraced the preaching and became part of the community, were baptized (Ferrario, 2008:111-112). At the end of the first century, formal catechetical training was

3 «The Augustinian influence is crucial also regarding the affirmation of the baptism’s validity. It takes place independently from the doctrinal orthodoxy or from the ethical quality of the one who receives the baptism or of the one who celebrates it. Therefore, it is not exaggerated to say that, in the first part of the V century, the doctrine and the practice of the ancient church undertakes the characteristics that will lead it also in the following centuries and that further will become consolidated with the command of the Christianity regime. That is to say, it will be consolidated also with the coexistence among civil community and ecclesiastical community: the well-known mass baptism under the imperial will symbolizes adequately such situation». 
introduced, before baptism would be administered. Professor Fulvio Ferrario is of the opinion that the practice of infant baptism dates back to the second half of the second century, but it did not become a custom generally embraced before the fifth century (Ferrario, 2008:112).

On the other hand, scholars, accepting infant baptism from the time of the New Testament churches, defend the position that infant baptism occurred from the earliest times. Their argument commonly allows for the reading and interpretation of the early Christian literature on baptism from the perspective of the New Testament, that, in their view, incorporated infant baptism within covenantal theological structures. The result of this line of interpretation is therefore quite the opposite of the above-mentioned argument: children were baptized in the early church.

Stepping into the gap, the current research intents to deal with the issue as it was reported in the primary sources. It aims to give an original answer to the following central question: did the first generations of Christians baptize infants? What did they record in their theological thinking and writing? A thorough investigation of primary sources should shed meaningful light on the question. It is in fact only once an accurate and in-depth historical exploration of the applicable Christian literature of that period is completed, that an answer to this problem could be given.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The fundamental aim of the study is to demarcate the concept of baptism in the early Christian intellectual trajectory of writing until the Council of Nicaea in 325. The rationale for the enquiry is obviously that
those writings closest to the original source, i.e. the New Testament itself, would be able to offer, better than others, a comprehensive perspective on the practices and administration of baptism according to the teaching and guidelines of Jesus Christ.

Following this early and accurate evidence, the objective will be to argue the case in terms of language and style, documentation and argumentation in such a way that a source-informed perspective on baptism, in particular infant baptism, during the first centuries of the Christian Era, will emerge from the research to act as substantiated guideline when the doctrine of baptism in the Christian church is considered. The primary Christian sources from the first four centuries indeed provide a comprehensive and reliable perspective on the question of whether children were at all baptized. An in-depth analysis of this literature offers enough information to reach a substantiated conclusion. The central question of the study can therefore be evidence-based answered.

1.3 Methodology

The research is conducted within the accepted parameters applicable to historical-critical research and argumentation. This premise entails that the identified primary sources form the core of the study, obviously in chronological order. These are subjected to investigation, closely lead by the central question of the research. Each of these primary early Christian documents, is understood and interpreted in terms of its theological intention, its context and its character. The results are studied thoroughly and described in a comprehensive, logical and systematized perspective, utilizing all the resources necessary for an academic discourse. Care is taken not to be
influenced, or carried away, by existing scholarship and assumptions. Scholarship will only be engaged as secondary literature, and in a critical way. The researcher’s first language is Italian and he is much more at home in Portuguese than in English. Great care, nevertheless, has been taken to present an acceptable English text of the research results.

1.4 The primary sources

For the purposes of this research I have relied on the patristic editions published by Città Nuova in Rome. Their collection on patristic literature and theology is recognized and is widely used in Italian universities of theology. The editions not only contain the texts in the original language, but offer a reliable translation into Italian. The researcher is responsible for English translations cited in the text below, as is indicated.

The Christian Classic Literature CCL 1 (J. G. Ph. Borleffs) is accepted as the critical reference text, as reported in the various works.

The primary sources due to be investigated are the following:

Didaché 7:1-4; 9:5

Barnaba’s letter 6:11; 11:11

The Shepherd of Hermas

• IIIª Vision 11:3,5; 15:3
• IXª Similitude 16:4; 31:2-3
• I° Commandment 2:1

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4 The critical text (CCL 1) is published in accordance with directive 93/98 CEE and the law of 22 April 1941 n. 633, article 85.
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Ignatius of Antioch
- Epistle to the Smyrnaeans 8:1-2,6

Justin Martyr
- Iª Apology 61:1-4,6,8; 65:1-2,5; 66:1

Irenaeus of Lyons
- Adversus haereses I 9:4; II 22:4; III 12:15; IV 23:2; IV 28:3

Tertullian
- De Baptismo 1:1; 4:4; 7:1; 8:1,3; 17:1-2; 18:4-5

Hippolytus of Rome
- Apostolic Tradition chap. 16: Professions and trades
- Apostolic Tradition chap. 21: Administration of Holy Baptism

Origines
- Homily on Luke 2:22
- Comment on Genesis Book III
- Homily 118 on Leviticus 12:2-7
- Comment 121 on the Romans 6:5-6

Baptism of the Novatians
- Ecclesiastical History Book VI, 43:14-15, 17

Ciprian
- Apology to Donato (chap. 4)
- De lapsis (chap. 9)
- Letter 64 (2:1, 5:1-2; 6:1-2)
- Letter 69 (2:2; 11:1,3; 12:1-3)
- Letter 70 (1:3; 3:1)
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- Letter 73 (3:1; 7:1; 18:2; 19:1; 21:2)
- Letter 74 (1:2; 2:1; 5:1-4; 6:1-2; 7:2; 9:2; 11:3; 18:1)

Synod of Alvira (306/312)  
- Canon I, XXXVII, XLII, XLV

Synod of Neo-Caesarea (314/325)  
- Canon VI, XII

Council of Nicaea (325)  
- Canon VIII, XIX

1.5 Exposition

The study comprises six chapters, followed by the bibliography. At the end of each chapter there is a synthesis so that the reader can follow the common thread and that he sees how the theology of baptism has evolved from one author to another.

The first chapter offers an introduction to the research and outlines the sources as well as the method employed in analyzing the early Christian literature. Chapter two entails an overview of New Testament information related to baptism and infant baptism. The New Testament is obviously the most fundamental document on the issue and provides us with useful indications on what was practiced in the early churches concerning the baptism of infants and children.

The following chapter (third) investigates the primary historical documents dated between 80 and 200 A.D. and covers thus (infant) baptism during the second century. These include the Didaché or the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (80-100 A.D.), the Letter of Barnabas
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(unknown - 61 A.D.), *Shepherd of Hermas* (unknown - 140/155 A.D.), Ignatius of Antioch (35-110 A.D.), Justin Martyr (100 – 165 A.D.) and Irenaeus of Lyons (130 - 200 A.D.).

Chapter four – Differentiated views and the incorporation of children at the beginning of the third century - focuses on historical documents from 200-250 A.D. These include: Tertullian (160-240 A.D.), Hippolytus of Rome (170 - 235 A.D.) and Origen (183/186 – 253 A.D).

Chapter five – Synodical decrees on the baptism of children until the Council of Nicaea (325) – offers an exposition of documents dated from 220-325 A.D. These encapsulate the views of Cyprian of Carthage (210-258 A.D.), Synod of Elvira (306/312 A.D.), Synod of Neo-Caesarea (314/325 A.D.) and the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.).

The ultimate chapter comprises a substantiated conclusion to the study.

1.6 Value of the study

The meaning of this study is not seated in the extraordinary excellence of its contribution to scholarship of the first Christian literature. Its significance surfaces actually at another level. In Italy, where Roman Catholic scholarship and theology have been the dominant force for centuries, and globally recognized for the research on early Christian thought, this study represents research from a protestant angle. It participates in the work of a modest group of young emerging (protestant) researchers in Italy, studying the sources in terms of their own insight and questioning, doing so with theological-critical
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distinguishing and argumentation. In this respect, the study represents a significant contribution of its own.
CHAPTER II

BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As stated in the Introduction above, the study commences with an analysis of the practice of Christian baptism as reported in the New Testament. The scrutiny of the writings of the New Testament allows us to approach the sources and thus to identify the original features of Christian baptismal practice. The first chapter starts with an exposition of baptism in the Gospels, followed by an investigation of the Acts of the Apostles. Then our attention shifts to the Pauline corpus, to conclude with the first letter of Peter. The New Testament data is subsequently summarized. The chapter culminates in a conclusion.

2.1 Baptism in the Gospels

The historical Jesus, the Master of Nazareth, during the Supper with his disciples, ordered them to «take, eat and drink», or as Luke says: «do this in remembrance of me», that is, to celebrate the Supper in future centuries, until his «return». It is interesting to note that the historical Jesus has not been the one to give the order to baptize; this order came from the risen Christ Jesus. He gave baptism to the church during the time after his resurrection and (just) before his atonement into heaven.

2.1.1 Matthew

«18 And when Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy
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Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you».\(^5\) \textit{Mt. 28:18-20}.

As we will see later, in the Book of Acts, baptism was ministered in the Name of Jesus Christ (Acts. 2:38; 10:48) or of the Lord Jesus (Acts. 8:16; 19:5), while here, in the Gospel of Matthew, the baptismal formula appears as Trinitarian.\(^6\) This formula quickly imposed itself, since the evangelist Matthew has attributed it to the risen Jesus and it obviously benefits from unique authority (Ricca, 2015:49). It is illuminating to note Professor Everett Ferguson’s explanation of Matthew’s baptismal formula, compared to the others in the New Testament that are not Trinitarian (Ferguson, 2014:164):

«In the Jewish environment there is reason to believe that in a proselyte to Jesus, the faith in God was presupposed and that at the moment of baptism it was necessary only to refer to Jesus, Lord or Christ, while in the pagan environment baptism was to be defined more fully, including God the Father, and that this led to the amplified version, extended also to the Holy Ghost. To verbally express the purpose or meaning of baptism, such as what put the baptized in a relationship with Christ or with the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, it may have been either the baptizer or, in different words, both [...]».

\(^5\) The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version.
\(^6\) The textual criticism raised a problem about this Trinitarian expression: «in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost», believing it to be a creation of the very first Christian community, also because Eusebius of Caesarea cited the mandate in different forms, most of the time omitting the expression concerning the Trinity. This suggests that he knew the text in an abbreviated form. A plausible explanation could be the following (Ferguson, 2014:162): «Since all other textual testimonies contain the full text, most critics have accepted it as the original one. The examination of Eusebius’ passages, in which the mandate to baptize is omitted, reveals that for the context this is superfluous (since in any case the universality of Christ’s teaching lies at the center, in contrast with the previous religious law). [...] It seems more plausible that Eusebius paraphrased when his interest was addressed to the mission of the apostles or to the ethical teaching of the Lord, and that he cited the text in its entirety when Trinitarian questions were in the foreground». Michelini (2013:468-469): «In the Church the understanding of the \textit{Trinitarian mystery} will gradually develop [...] the tripartite formula of Mt. 28:19 will become the basis of the liturgy of baptism (Christians are baptized in the name and in the names of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. This practice must then be compared with the rigorous Jewish monotheism and the polytheism of the pagans [...]».
The audience that Matthew addresses is probably a predominant Jewish-Christian community that lived around the last quarter of the first century in Syria and probably in Antioch (Marguerat, 2004:76). This community originated in a group of Jews who had recognized in Christ the Messiah of Israel. Then, due to the persecution by the synagogue and after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (70 A.D.), those Jews had sought refuge in Syria where they eventually had encountered the gentile-Christians. In such a situation, the theological perspectives of the Judeo-Christians had expanded, hence the Gospel of Matthew addresses all people without distinction and regardless of belonging (Brown, 2011:305).

Matthew thus confirms the continuity with the ancient promises of Israel and, at the same time, sustains fidelity to the figure of the Messiah. His disciples did not appoint their own disciples, nor did they gave rise to a succession of teachers in a sequence dating back to Jesus, but they led their proselytes to directly follow Jesus. He remains the only Master (Mt. 23:9-10) and all those that follow Him are his disciples who have the assignment of obeying his teachings. Baptism is an element of the decision to follow Him and to acquire the fundamental condition of becoming and being a disciple. Consequently, just as the rite of baptism is in itself not sufficient enough if it is not combined with proper instruction, in the same way the teaching is not sufficient, if there is not also a total immersion in the mystery of Christ (Michelini, 2013:468).
2.1.2 Mark

«15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believed and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned». Mk. 16:15-16.

The oldest manuscript tradition (Corsani, 1991:208) attested only partially to the text of Mark 16:9-20. Therefore, there are those who believe that these verses are not part of the original text of Mark. However, there are also authoritative supporters of their authenticity. In any case, the origins of the passage date back before the end of the second century, since Irenaeus quotes Mk. 16:19 as conclusion of the Gospel of Mark.

Whether verses fifteen and sixteen are original or a more recent addition, they serve as important comments on the meaning of Mt. 28:19-20. Moreover, they also testify about the original conviction of

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7 The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version.
8 Marguerat (2004:49): «From the side of the manuscript tradition, two great uncials of the fourth century, Sinaitico (8) and Vatican (B), end in Mk.16:8».
10 Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3,10,5. (Cosentino, II, 2009:44).
11 La Bibbia di Gerusalemme (2009:2432): «[...] the current ending has been known since the second century by Tazian and Irenaeus and has found its place in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts and translations of the early centuries. If one cannot prove that it had Mark as author, it always remains “an authentic relic of the first Christian generation”». La Bibbia Via Verità e Vita (2009:2156): «Mk. 16:9-20. These verses do not belong to the original text of Mark: they are missing in some ancient and authoritative manuscripts (such as the Sinaitico and the Vatican, from the fourth century). Some manuscripts have another ending [...]. The current text, however, dates back to the end of the first or beginning of the second century: perhaps it is a synthesis of the apparitions, whose memory was alive in the Church of the origins. For some, it replaces a lost end of the original Gospel; for others, originally, Mark’s ending was 16:8: an abrupt and disconcerting end that would have led to integration. The fact that 16:9-20 was not written by Mark does not mean that this text is not canonical and inspired». La Bibbia EMMAUS (1998:1841): «[...] Mk. 16:9-20, is called the end of Mark and is missing in several manuscripts, while in others it is otherwise reported. The critical solution is difficult, but on its inspired value the definition of the Council of Trent of 8.4.1546 has been expressed». 
how important baptism was as a prerequisite for salvation and about its connection to the faith (Ferguson, 2014:165, Stewart, 1988:421).

2.1.3 Luke

Luke has several analogies to Mark and Matthew in which, with reference to the baptism of John, the words «baptize» (Lk. 7:29-30) and «baptismo» (Lk. 3:3; 7:29, 12:50) occur, where Matthew and Mark do not use them. However, the main references to Christian baptism can be found in his second book, the Acts of the Apostles (see paragraph 2.2).

2.1.4 John

Rather than being a chronologically ordered account of facts relating to the life and ministry of Christ, the Gospel of John is to be considered a witness to the extraordinary person and work done by the Son of God as the incarnated Logos for the salvation of the world (Bolognesi, 2007:312).

12 In this research, I have focused my attention on Christian baptism, that is why in the various paragraphs relating to the Gospels, I have not spoken of the baptism of John. In summary, we could mention the following: John’s baptism is called a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mk. 1:4; Lk 3:3); John himself said that he baptized “with water because of (or for) repentance” (Mt. 3:11). The main characteristic was therefore that it symbolized the repentance of baptized persons. This is also clear from the context of the accounts of the baptisms, in which John spoke of repentance and the people confessed (Mt. 3:7-10; Mk. 1:5; Lk. 3:7-14). In this context, we also see the two parts of the meaning of repentance. First of all, it means “changing your mind”, deciding that what you did was wrong: that is, confessing the wrong. Secondly, it is a commitment not to do it anymore, not only to change one’s mind but also to change one’s life, to live differently, in a right way: that is, to bear fruits worthy of repentance.

Stewart (2007:55): «[...] It was an exhortation to true penitence and to a change of heart, manifested by abandoning sin and by living a consecrated life at the service of God. This exhortation was supported by the imminent appariition of the Messiah, and by the punishments he was to inflict on the ungodly. He administered baptism as a seal to all those who accepted his doctrine». John’s baptism was thus associated with repentance and this means that it was the outer manifestation of an inner change (Walwoord, Zuck, 2002:227). John’s message therefore had a twofold accentuation: (1) The imminent appearance of the messianic kingdom, and (2) the urgent need for repentance to prepare for this event (Mt. 3:2). To sum up, we could say that (Bolognesi, 2007:314): «John’s baptism was a symbolic act for the purification of sin, and it was therefore accompanied by repentance. [...] When Jesus entered into the scene, John’s role as a forerunner was completed as he gave his personal testimony to Jesus as messiah (Jn. 1:29)». 
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 of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.\(^1\)

Verbal analogies identify the birth from above\(^14\) and they counter-pose it with the natural birth recalled by Nicodemus (3:4). The one who generates is composed of two elements: water and Spirit. This is to underline that the birth from water and the birth from the Spirit are important. The fundamental point is the activity of the Spirit.\(^15\) Therefore, this is the element that distinguishes the new birth from the baptism of John, and that is an issue that Nicodemus must have known (Ricca, 2015:14).

Only the Spirit of God can elicit a new birth by transmitting a new spiritual life. It is also an opportunity, according to the Gospel of John, as it represents the moment when the Word is accepted in faith (Jn. 1:12-13; 3:36) and the individual is subject to baptism (Ferguson, 2014:171).

\(^{13}\) The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version.

\(^{14}\) Walwood, Zuck, (2002:302): «Jesus was not at the same level as Nicodemus. He is “from above” v.31 (ο ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν […] v.31) and therefore Nicodemus had to be born “from above” or “born again”. The Greek word (ἄνωθεν) means both things; for example, it is translated with the words “from above” in Jn 19:11 and with “again” in Gal. 4:9. It means experiencing a spiritual transformation, which leads from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God (cf. Col. 1:113). The kingdom is the sphere of God’s authority, and the blessing that is now invisible will be manifested on earth (Mt. 6:19)».

\(^{15}\) Rodman (2009:34): «Regeneration is first and foremost the work of the Holy Ghost. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn. 3:6). The new birth comes “of the Spirit”, so there is no other possibility: it must proceed from the Holy Ghost!». 
2.2 Baptism in the Acts of the Apostles

The Book of the Acts, with its many reports on conversion, is the book in the New Testament that entails the most occurrences in which the expression «baptize» or «baptism» is used. We will now try to analyze the most significant biblical references in which there are these expressions so that we can have an overview that can shed light on the practice of baptism in the earliest churches and Christian communities.

2.2.1 Speech by Peter (Acts 2:37-41)\(^{16}\)

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Peter during the Pentecostal preaching, responded to the request of his listeners inviting them to baptism with a naturalness that make us think that it was already a habitual practice.

The listeners asked what they should do and Peter answered:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
«Πέτρος δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· Μετανοήσατε, καὶ βαπτισθήτω τοῖς ὑμῖν ἐπὶ τῷ ὄνοματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ» & «Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins», \hspace{1cm} \textit{Acts. 2:37-41}. \hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\(^{16}\) The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. 40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41 Then they that gladly received this word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls». \textit{Acts. 2:37-41}.

\(^{17}\) Rodman (2009:273): «[…] for the forgiveness of sins […] Acts. 2:38 The Greek word εἰς, which is rendered here with “for”, can also mean «in order to», or «to obtain», so it is about a requirement to receive the remission of sins. However, the term εἰς can also be translated as «concerning», «relative to», «in reference to», «speaking of» thus it denotes a baptism related to remission, but not necessarily aimed at obtaining remission. Both translations are possible, but the second one seems to be the most appropriate because, in no other passage of the Acts, we read that water baptism in itself implies the remission of sins. Therefore, verse Acts. 2:38 does not present water baptism as a requirement for receiving remission of sins, since remission of sins is received by faith, not by
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν, καὶ λήμψεσθε τὴν δώρεαν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος</th>
<th>and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost». (2:38).19</th>
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Here, water baptism is «in the name of Jesus Christ» and it is distinct from the promised gift of the Holy Ghost. The promise made to Peter’s listeners and their children (2:39) does not make one think of children's baptism, since it is logical to rather consider that the promise refers to the gift of the Holy Ghost. On this occasion, however, «those who received his word» (2:41) and repented (2:38) were baptized; in the general context, the «sons and daughters» (2:17) were grown up enough to prophesy (Ferguson, 2014:201).

Luke indicated here what it meant to become a Christian. Those who accept the preaching of the Apostles (2:41), recognize Jesus as Lord and Messiah (2:36), moreover repent and are baptized in his name (2:38), receive forgiveness, the Holy Ghost and salvation (2:38-39), and then they participate in community life (2:41-47).20 In conclusion, it is proved that:

«Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls». Acts. 2:41.

baptism. However, when baptism occurs, it is expressly related to the forgiveness of sins that has been received by faith».

19 The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version.
20 Rossé (2010:59): «From the narrative point of view this great abstract marks a pause (the verbs are in the present perfect form), but it is still to be tied to the contest: it describes the life of those who have welcomed the Word and have been inserted into the ecclesial community. The Mother Church of Jerusalem is seen as the ideal model of every community life». 
2.2.2 Samaritan Christians (Acts 8:5-25)\textsuperscript{21}

Philip, one of the seven leaders among the Hellenists in the church of Jerusalem, preached Christ in Samaria. His work played an important role in spreading the Gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria.

Many Samaritans «gave heed unto those things» which Philip preached\textsuperscript{22} (8:5) and they saw the signs and miracles he performed (8:6). Those who «believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women» (8:12). It is significant, therefore, to note that nothing is recorded about children (Ferguson, 2014:202).

2.2.3 The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)\textsuperscript{23}

The narrative speaks about the conversion of a eunuch. The text does not say whether he was a Jew or a Jewish proselyte.

Philip did not get involved in theological arguing, but he went to the heart of the matter: he preached Jesus to him (8:32-35). Obviously,

\textsuperscript{21} The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «\textbf{12} But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. \textbf{14} Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: \textbf{15} Who, then they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: \textbf{16} (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) \textbf{17} Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost». \textit{Acts. 8:12,14-17.}

\textsuperscript{22} Rossé (2010:113): «He preached (ἐκηρύσσει). For the first time in the Acts the author uses the verb preaching, from which comes the term kerygma, used by scholars to indicate the fundamental content of Christian preaching, the “first” announcement».

\textsuperscript{23} The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «\textbf{34} And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh and prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man? \textbf{35} Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. \textbf{36} And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, Seem here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? \textbf{37} And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. \textbf{38} And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. \textbf{39} And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing». \textit{Acts 8:34-39.}
he must have also spoken to him about baptism in water, since, when
they arrived where there was water, the eunuch said:

«[…] ἐπὶ τι ὕδωρ, καὶ φησιν ὃ ἐννοοῖς· ἵδοῦ ὕδωρ, τί ΚΟΛΥΕΙ24 με βαπτισθῆναι;»
(8:36).25

«[…] See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?».
(8:36).26

The question of the eunuch required an answer. However, baptism could not be administered without a profession of faith27 (Ferguson, 2014:204). This being made by the candidate, he was baptized. Confession of faith «Jesus Christ is the Son of God» (8:37) thus preceded the baptism.

The narrative of baptism makes one think of an immersion, because «… they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch» (8:38). The most natural explanation of Philip’s entry into the water together with the eunuch is an immersion administered by Philip. We have to consider that these details were common to other baptismal cases as well (Ferguson, 2014:204).

24 Willimon (2003:87-88): «He converts himself and asks what prevents him from being baptized. Perhaps we have here, in the word “prevent”, a fragment of the ancient baptismal liturgy that asked, about a candidate: What prevents this person from being baptized? Cullmann also supports that the expression «what prevents?» could be present in an original baptismal formula (Cullmann 1950:71-80).
26 The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version.
27 Ricca (2015:51): «The condition of baptism is faith. In the New Testament many baptisms take place immediately after the advent of faith. […] But what is the confession of faith required for baptism? At the beginning it was a confession of faith articulated not yet in the Trinitarian sense, but limited to the person of Jesus, recognized as the Son of God». 
2.2.4 Conversion and Baptism of Paul (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-21)\textsuperscript{28}

In the Acts, the episode of Saul’s conversion occurs three times,\textsuperscript{29} and in two of them, his baptism is mentioned. Conversion is implicit, but it would be more appropriate to say that the object of the story is Saul’s call to be an apostle of the Gentiles.

The statement that Paul stood up (22:16) from kneeling or prostrating in prayer, suggests that he had to go elsewhere to be baptized.

Ananias said:

\begin{tabular}{|l|}
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« καὶ νῦν τί μέλλεις; ἀναστὰς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἀμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ». (22:16).\textsuperscript{30} \\
\hline
And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord». (22:16).\textsuperscript{31} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

What do the words «washed away thy sins», mean? Do they teach that salvation is received with the water of baptism? As a matter of fact, consult Prof. John F. Walwoord (Walwoord, Zuck, 2002:448-449):

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{28} The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized». \textit{Acts. 9:17-18}. «14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. 15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. 16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.». \textit{Acts. 22:14-16}.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{29} Willimon (2003:90): «Acts 9:1-19 is only one of the three reports of Saul’s conversion. Only an event of the utmost importance would have deserved such a repetition by an author whose characteristic is brevity and conciseness», Rossé (2010:121): «Starting from this chapter, Luke turns his attention more decisively to the beginning of the true and proper mission in the pagan world, that is a mission that will be inaugurated by Peter in chapter 10, and from which the “chosen vessel” (9:15) will be Paul, whose meeting with the Risen One is now narrated».
\end{quote}

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\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{31} The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version.
\end{quote}
<When was Paul saved? On the road to Damascus or at Judas’ home? Several factors support the first hypothesis:<br>1. The gospel was presented to him directly by Christ (Ga. 1:11-12) and was not presented later by Ananias.<br>2. Paul had already said that he was subject to the faith in Christ (Acts. 22:10).<br>3. Paul was filled with the Holy Ghost before his baptism with water (Acts. 9:17-18).<br>4. The Greek participle ἐπικαλεσάμενος, translates as invoking its name, and it refers both to the action that the subject is accomplishing at that same time, and to the action before the main verb. The invocation of Christ’s name (for salvation) took place before his baptism in water and the verb can be translated by «calling on his name».<br>Paul had already been purified spiritually, so these words must refer to the symbolic meaning of baptism. Baptism is the image of the work of purification of sin, which God accomplishes in the human being (with reference to 1 Co. 6:11; 1 Pe. 3:21).»<br>The narrative of Paul’s baptism includes the invocation of the name of Jesus, the elimination of sins, the fulfillment with the Holy Ghost, and the acceptance into a local community. Paul’s conversion took place not long after the beginning of the Jerusalem church; his baptism (in Damascus) confirms that baptism very soon became a consolidated Christian custom (Ferguson, 2014:206).<br><br><strong>2.2.5 The centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48)<br></strong><br>The events of the Acts 10 have been called «the Gentile Pentecost» because, as in the Acts 2, the Holy Ghost descended upon...
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The passage of the Acts 10:44-48 describes a fundamental turning point in the history of Christian baptism. Here a group of heathens receive it. Previously the baptism had always been given to the Jews of Jerusalem or of the diaspora, or to Samaritans who in any case worshipped the God of Israel, or to an Ethiopian who «had come to Jerusalem to worship» (8:27). Therefore, the Ethiopian was one of the so-called «worshippers» of the God of Israel, although they were not circumcised and they did not observe Jewish ritual prescriptions. However, he sympathized with Judaism and he went periodically to Jerusalem, indeed «to worship». Cornelius, as well, was «a devout man, and one that feared God» (10:2), certainly «pleasing to God» for his prayers and alms (10:14, 34), even if he was an uncircumcised heathen. However, when Peter came to him, his relatives and friends (10:24), whom we can suppose did not «fear God» as Cornelius did, were also present.

Peter proclaimed Jesus to all. He preached the one who lived «doing good» (10:38), who died, who raised and who has been believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days». Acts. 10:24,42-48.

33 Rossé (2010:121): «It marks the beginning, by divine will and under the authority of Peter confirmed by the Mother Church, of the entry of non-judges into the people of salvation, and therefore the opening of the mission to the world of those who came from paganism».
34 Willimon (2003:111): «It is about a pagan, certainly, and a Roman soldier, but also a pious person, as Luke wants to demonstrate with the tireless repetition of the devotion of the centurion in vv.2,4,22,30. He is a foreigner, but he is at least on the edge of the community; he is also a pagan who wants to be educated and guided». 
appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead, concluding with these words: «[...] through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins» (10:43). At that moment, the Holy Ghost «fell» on «all them which heard the word» (10:44), consistently with the word. Baptism with water is thus an act distinguished from the outpouring of the Holy Ghost that precedes it.35

2.2.5.1 The issue of an entire family baptized

The conversion of the people that lived in Cornelius’ home, is the first case of baptism in water performed towards an entire family. The cases of family conversions are used as arguments in favor of children’s baptism in New Testament times. It is not certain whether the word household (family or household) included also the infants and the children who could be present (Barth, 1987:174-175), nor does it mean that there were necessarily infants in the family. It can be accepted that the presence of children, from time to time (Ferguson, 2014:210), should have been indicated. For example, Ignatius of Antioch in his letter to the Church of Izmir, when addressing families, specifies the presence or absence of children (Tettamanzi, 2017²:116):

«I greet the families of my brothers, with their wives and their children, and the virgins called widows. Be strong in the power of the Spirit. Filone, who is with me, greets you. I greet the family of Tavia, which I hope it is confirmed in faith, in corporal and spiritual charity. I greet Alce, a dear name for me, the incomparable Daphin and Eutecno and all, each by name. Be well in the grace of God».

35 Rossé (2010:121): «In our account the sacred author considers the effusion of the Spirit not as a moment of the baptismal rite, but as its legitimization, and baptism appears as an act of obedience of the Church to the divine initiative. This gift makes the pagan-Christians equal to the Judeo-Christians, what Peter explains in v.47: «they have received the Holy Ghost as well as we did». Luke thus laid the foundation for the access of pagans to Christian baptism, which, historically, did not happen without hesitation and conflict». 
Prof. Ricca believes that it is not clear what is meant by the term «family» and, in particular, whether it included children and, more precisely, newborns. He believes that we are generally tempted to believe that they were included because we apply today's criteria to the family of the time (Ricca, 2015:37).

Therefore, it is not possible to start from the concept of «house» to establish whether children and infants were also included in the household baptism (Barth, 1987:176). In conclusion, the proof of «house» in favor of infant baptism is very weak, and usually the scholars who offer it, admit that it is an assumption, since the scriptures never affirmed that children were baptized (Rodman, III, 2009:286). Hence, this is an insoluble issue (Cullmann, 1950:28-29).

In Cornelius’s case, his house «feared God» (10:2), and it heard Peter’s preaching (10:33-44;11:14), it believed (10:43; 11:17), it repented (11:18), it received the Holy Ghost, it spoke with tongues (10:44-46), and it magnified God (10:46): all types of activities that are hardly attributable to small children (Ferguson, 2014:210-211).

2.2.6 Lydia (Acts 16:12-15)

Chapter sixteen of the Acts describes two baptisms at Philippi; they have been the first ones in the European continent of which we have knowledge. The first one concerns a businesswoman, Lydia. She was a «devotee of God», a gentile proselyte or a member of Judaism:

36 Karl Barth calls this evidence as «a thin thread to which we might perhaps hold on», but then adds «with great difficulty!» (Barth, 1959:44).
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«13 And on the Sabbath we went37 out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. 14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us». Acts 16:13-15.

The expression «where prayer was wont to be made» (16:14) indicates the synagogue, that is, the place intended for the Jewish assembly. This place may not even indicate a specific building.38 Its location was «by a river side» (16:13). The choice of the location of a synagogue was often made by choosing a place close to a waterway because it facilitated the rituals of purification. In this case, this location has also facilitated the Christian baptism.

Her baptism takes place together with her household39 and after careful listening to the words that were spoken (16:13-14). Lydia’s prompt receptivity is attributed to God, who opened40 her heart to be able to receive the words spoken by Paul. We can allude to her faith

37 Willimon (2003:111): «These passages with the term “us” consist of a total of ninety-seven verses in Acts. (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28). Scholars have proposed three possible explanations for these passages with “us”. Perhaps the author of the Acts was Paolo’s travel companion for a part of his itinerary [...]}. Others suggested that the term “we” had been found by the author of the Acts in one of his sources and it has been included in his book, although he himself had not really been a companion of Paul [...]}. The other possibility is that the term “we” is a literary expedient used by Luca as a subtle means to fill the gap between the period of the church in which Paul’s travels actually took place and the time in which these travel stories were collected [...]».

38 Walwoord, Zuck, (2002:448-428): «A synagogue could arise where there were at least ten Jewish males».

39 Due to the issue of the baptism of an entire home or family, where some believe that children were also involved, see the observations in 2.2.5.1.

40 Henry, XI, (2003:286): «She paid much attention to the word of God. Her heart was so open, that it made her attentive to the things said by Paul; and she not only paided attention to his preaching, but, as some interpret the passage, she applied to herself the things said by Paul. [...] This was a proof of the openness of his heart, and it represented a fruit of it. Every time the heart is open to God’s grace, this is manifested through diligent attention to His word, both for the love of Christ, to whom it belongs, and for our own good, since it concerns us very closely». 
based on her words (16:15). The composition of Lidia’s household is not specified, and only the presence of some women (who probably worked in her business) is mentioned. If there were any men it is certain that on that occasion, they were not present. The problem is whether or not there were any children.\footnote{Due to the issue of the baptism of an entire home or family, where some believe that children were also involved, see the observations in 2.2.5.1.} If there were, they were grown up enough to join Lidia to listen to Paul’s words and believe them (Ferguson, 2014:210-211).

2.2.7 The keeper of the prison of Philippi (Acts 16:25-34)\footnote{The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed [their] stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house». Acts. 16:29-34.}

Paul, chasing a «spirit of divination» away (16:16-18) from a young slave, exploited for profit as a soothsayer by her masters, induced them to accuse Paul and Silas in front of the magistrate. While the missionaries were in prison, an earthquake freed the prisoners from their chains. Right afterwards there is the story of the conversion and baptism of the keeper of the prison.

The text does not explain how the keeper of the prison could have asked for salvation (16:30) or what he meant by that word. Undoubtedly, he heard the Gospel message of Paul and Silas. Moreover, he heard the story of the soothsayer servant and about how she proclaimed that these men were servants of God, announcing salvation in Jesus (16:17). Probably, also the prayers and the songs of Paul and Silas (16:25) had reached his ears. The terrible earthquake, which opened the doors and that gave the prisoners the possibility of
escaping, and the reassuring words of Paul as well, had prompted the pagan keeper of the prison to ask which was the way of salvation (Walwoord, Zuck, 2002:429).

Whatever happened, it is certain that Paul and Silas took advantage of that opportunity to move the issue to another dimension.\(^\text{43}\) The indication of believing in the Lord Jesus (16:31)\(^\text{44}\) was immediately followed by the fact that «they spake unto him, the word of the Lord» (16:32) so that the keeper of the prison would understand in whom and what he should believe. The story ends with the confirmation that in addition to believing in Jesus Christ, he had also understood that He was God (16:34).

By washing the wounds of the prisoners, the keeper of the prison expressed his redemption and repentance (16:33). Baptism was the immediate consequence of accepting the Christian gospel during «the same hour of the night» (16:33). In the story of the conversion of the keeper of the prison of Philippi, the baptism of a family\(^\text{45}\) is also related, that is, of «all that were in his house» (16:32). About all of them, it is also written that they joined in believing in the Lord Jesus (16:31-33); that Paul and Silas addressed them (16:32); that they joined the keeper of the prison for the baptism (16:33); and that they rejoiced because of believing in God (16:34) (Ferguson, 2014:212).

\(^{43}\) Rossé (2010:196): «The answer corresponds to Luke’s traditional teaching: Salvation is linked to faith in Jesus Christ».

\(^{44}\) Walwoord, Zuck (2002:429): «v.31 is a key step in the message of faith. All that is asked for justification is faith in the Lord Jesus. The prison officer asked what he had to do and the answer was that he had to “do” nothing, but only believe that Jesus is the Lord».

\(^{45}\) Due to the issue of the baptism of an entire home or family, where some believe that children were also involved, see the observations in 2.2.5.1.
2.2.8 Crispus (The Acts 18:8)

The Acts 18:8 contains a brief summary on what happened with Crispus:

«And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized». Acts. 18:8.46

Crispus represents another case where it is spoken of the conversion of an entire household,47 since the text states that «all his house» believed. The story, even if synthetic, highlights the events that preceded48 the baptism, therefore that many of the Corinthians «hearing believed, and were baptized» (18:8) that is: listen, faith and baptism.

2.2.9 Disciples (of John the Baptist?) (Acts 19:1-5)

This narrative is the only example of rebaptism in the New Testament:

«1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, 2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. 3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism. 4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus». Acts. 19:1-5.

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46 The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version.
47 Due to the issue of the baptism of an entire home or family, where some believe that children were also involved, see the observations in 2.2.5.1.
48 Rossé (2010:212): «Paul’s preaching in the synagogue caused the conversion of Cyprus and many others in its following». 
When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he found some disciples (perhaps of John the Baptist)\textsuperscript{49} and he asked them if they had received the Holy Ghost when they came to faith. They replied that they had not heard whether there was any Holy Ghost (19:2). Paul immediately moved on to a second question: «Unto what then were ye baptized? » (19:3).

Paul explained to them that John baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they «should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus» (19:4) When they heard this, «they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus» (19:5).\textsuperscript{50}

In this passage two characteristics of Christian baptism emerge:

1. Baptism is connected to faith in Christ Jesus.
2. Baptism is in the name of the Lord Jesus.

2.3 Baptism in the letters of Paul.

Some letters of the New Testament traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul are considered by textual critique as belonging to the «deutero-pauline» school, that is, what others refer to as «Paul after Paul» (Ricca, 2015:29). Since this is a research focused on the origins of Christianity, I will not go into the matter of the author of the various letters. However, I will restrict myself to consider them all as Pauline,

\textsuperscript{49} Walwoord, Zuck (2002:448-439): «What Luke meant by the term disciples is unclear, since he usually used it to indicate Christians; perhaps in this passage too it has this meaning, since in Paul’s question there were words when you believed (that is, when you believed in Jesus Christ). Even the response of these disciples is rather obscure; with words, we have not even heard that there is the Holy Ghost».

\textsuperscript{50} Rossé (2010:212): «Luke is keen to distinguish well the two baptisms, influencing Paul’s traditional formulation (v.4). John’s baptism is given only in view of his conversion, considered by Luke as the first step towards the Christian faith». 34
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as the ancient Church did, in agreement with the great Athanasius of Alexandria.\textsuperscript{51}

Although the Apostle Paul declared that Christ did not send him to baptize but to evangelize (1Cor. 1:17), baptism is a central theme in his theology. We will try to highlight some of his key statements by analyzing three of his fourteen letters.

2.3.1 Letter to the Romans

The Pauline letters do not give any instructions on how to practice baptism in the different churches; while, instead, the Epistle to the Romans, offers the most precise reflection of the New Testament on the meaning of baptism.\textsuperscript{52}

The essential message is the following: far from leading to sin, the gospel of God’s grace frees from the power of sin (6:1-4).\textsuperscript{53} The first prerequisite for such a declaration lies in the Pauline understanding of the human condition which does not speak of sins (in the plural), in the sense of transgressions, but of sin (in the singular) as a power which

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\textsuperscript{51} Athanasius of Alexandria also known by the appellation of Athanasius the Great is considered an important doctor of the Church (Alexandria 295 approx. – Ivi, 373). He was bishop of Alexandria from 328 until his death. He brought to maturity the literary genre of the \textit{Festal Letters}, making it an instrument of catechesis. The 39th Festal Letter, dated to 367, marks a decisive milestone in the history of the Canon, because it gives for the first time a complete list of the 27 books of the New Testament. Atanasio (2003:511-512): «[...] there are fourteen epistles of Paul, written by order in this way: the first to the Romans, then two to the Corinthians and, after these, to the Galatians and, subsequently, to the Ephesians, then to the Philippians and to the Colossians, and after these, two to the Thessalonians and to the Jews; [...]».

\textsuperscript{52} The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? 2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? 3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 4 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: 6 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». \textit{Rom. 6:1-6}.

\textsuperscript{53} Lémonon (1999:96): «In these verses he expresses a common conviction of the primitive community. The Christian life is incompatible with sin because, once Christian are baptized in the death of Christ, they are fully assimilated to him».

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takes possession of existence.\textsuperscript{54} In Romans 7:7-25 Paul is talking in detail about a second premise; the law and the sin are not opposites, but they constitute the system that determines the life of the «old man» (Achtemeier, 2014:121).

The argument evokes the gesture of baptism, that is, the immersion and re-emersion of the baptized out of the water to symbolize the death of the «old man» (6:6) and the rebirth of the individual as a new creature. In other words, the person who dies in baptism is not the Christian, but the pre-Christian man, the «old man», since he is complicit and victim of the sin to which he is enslaved. By that death and resurrection, believers were associated with the destiny of Christ (6:3).\textsuperscript{55} They were buried with him (6:4), they were inserted, grafted on to his death, they were crucified (6:5-7), and they died with Him (6:8-10). As Christ is raised from the dead, they also lead a new life (6:4), they are freed from the sin\textsuperscript{56} that reigned over their «old man», participating in His resurrection (6:5-7), and so they will live with Him (6:8-10).\textsuperscript{57}

Therefore, baptism inserts the individual Christian into the event of Golgotha where he died as «an old man» and where he is born «by hope» (8:24) as «a new man», beginning to exist as «dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord» (6:11). In

\textsuperscript{54} Walwoord, Zuck (2002:501): «Paul recognizes that even as a believer, he has within himself the principle of sin. It once reigned over him, as over a slave and it still expresses itself through the wrong actions, that he does not want to accomplish. This is a common problem for all believers».

\textsuperscript{55} Pulcinelli (2014:93): «Paul emphasizes what for him is the fundamental aspect of Christian baptism [...] that of being baptized (literally, «immersed» in Christ). […] This means that the Christian, through the initiatory gesture of immersion in water, mystically dies and participates in the one death of Christ: he dies with him, who died for us (cf. 2 Cor 5:14)».

\textsuperscript{56} Lémonon (1999:100): «The Christian is buried in Christ’s death for a new life; baptism causes the body to die since it is an instrument of sin. The baptism makes the Christian participate in Christ’s life for God. A time of slavery ends. The baptismal rite expresses the supremacy of Christ over the believer at the sin expense».

\textsuperscript{57} Bruce (2003:274): «For a baptized Christian, to remain in sin is as absurd as it is absurd for a free slave to remain tied to the old owner».
baptism one creature dies and another one is born, a story is closed and a new one opens. The destiny of believers in this way is parallel to the destiny of Christ. By his death he died once and for all, so that, having been raised from the dead, he definitively escaped the kingdom of death. Similarly, believers, dying in their old existence, are also freed once and for all from the empire of sin (Vouga, 2007:356).

**2.3.2 Letter to the Galatians**

In the letter to the Galatians two new constitutive aspects of Pauline doctrine on baptism appear:

> **27** For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
> **28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus».

The first aspect is that in baptism the believer not only is inserted into the death of Jesus, but he also «have put on» (3:27) Him. Christ is compared to a dress that the baptized puts on: in baptism, the person strips himself of his being and puts on Christ. The second aspect highlighted about baptism is that, by inserting the believer into Christ, it introduces him into his new body, which is the church, whose characteristic feature is that «There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one

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58 Pulcinelli (2014:96): «To be united to him through union with his death (with initial reference to baptism) involves dying to sin (separation from his oppressive power), but in a positive sense it means above all being united to a living person; here then is the application to the life of Christians (v.11)».

59 The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version.

60 Cousarar (2003:110): «Therefore, baptism is the occasion which considers the believer in virtue of divine grace inserted into that authority together with other believers and so the ones who «have put on Christ» (v.27).

61 Lémomon (1999:507-508): «Like Paul, the Galatians can say: «yet not I, but Christ liveth in me». Christ transforms the baptized into his image; the Christian is a human being recreated before God, of whom Jesus Christ is the model and author».
in Christ Jesus» (3:28). This is one of the most audacious statements of the New Testament and it is one of the central truths of the Christian message. This does not mean that religious differences no longer exist, but that they no longer separate. Since they do not prevent from having communion in Christ, given that they do no longer have an absolute value, but only a relative one, since the communion with Christ has the absolute value (Ricca, 2015:23).

The next chapter continues with the affirmation that those who are in Christ have received adoption as children of God (4:5-6). Baptism did not make them children of God - faith did so (3:26). Just as faith justified Abraham, in such a way we now receive the blessing of Abraham through faith (2:16; 3:6-9, 11, 22). By faith we are descendants of Abraham, and not by flesh (3:7). Faith is the reason why we are heirs of the promises made to Abraham. But when does faith make us such? (Ferguson, 2014:176):

«Paul unites faith and baptism together as two aspects of being incorporated into Christ. Now we belong to Christ on the basis of faith in him, being baptized in him. If one has to distinguish between the relationship of faith and baptism on the one hand, and the blessing indicated on the other, one could say that baptism is the moment when faith and reason are given. The baptized believer is now of Christ (3:29), and genius means either possession or belonging to the group that originated from Christ».

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62 Romanello (2014:63): «One notable characteristic is their “being in Christ” (vv.26-28), that is a phrase that indicates a profound union with the Risen Christ. The metaphor that says that the ones baptized “have put on Christ” is not to be understood as an exterior covering, but it designates a profound encounter between personalities, which leads Christ almost to adhere to the person of the believer, as his suit. This is made possible by baptism».

63 Marguerat (2004:243): «[...] the gospel is incompatible with every definition of the person according to the criterion of abstract categories (Jews, Greeks, slaves, free men, males, females) or according to his qualification by means of a particular election [...]».

64 Cousarar (2003:115): «The people of God are no longer defined as such by law, but by Christ: because they belong to him, since they are united to him through baptism». 
2.3.3 Letter to the Colossians

«10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: 11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead». Col. 2: 10-13.

The letters to the Romans (6:3-4) and to the Colossians (2:12) both affirm that in baptism Christians «have been buried» with Christ. While in the letter to the Romans it is indicated that this happens so that «[...] like as Christ was raised up from the dead [...], so we also should walk in newness of life» (6:4), in the letter to the Colossians Paul goes further by stating that during baptism «in Him you have also been raised together» (2:12).

Baptism represents, in an effective way, the death of an existence without Christ and the entrustment of this existence into the hands of Christ. Since they were buried, they were raised by virtue of their faith in the Risen One. The resurrection is considered here in two ways: in the proper sense, that is, that Christ rose from the dead by the very power of God, and in the figurative sense, namely in the sense that

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65 The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version.
66 Belli (2015:55): «The image used is that of «circumcision», but it does not refer to the one operated by hands, but that «of Christ» (v.11) which involves the totality of the person. Just as in Judaism, circumcision was a sign of the new belonging to God and to the people through the sign of the removal of the foreskin, in the same way in baptism occurs not only the unclothing of a part of the body as a symbol, but the total unclothing of the old man («of the flesh»). This removal represents the participation in the death and resurrection of Christ (v.12) through the act of baptism, by which believers are assimilated to Him in his destiny of death (of the old man: «buried with Him») and resurrection («raise with Him»).
67 Martini (2014:130-131): «Paul analyzes the way in which he believed that the «fullness of life» reached the readers. In simple terms, he addresses his attention to those memorable life experiences of the Colossians, such as the baptism (vv.11-12), the new life in a spiritual awakening from death (v.13), the forgiveness and a new position before God (v.14) since Christ, the victor, has defeated all their enemies and accusers (v.15)».
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concerns believers in their present situation, and no longer in the future as it was the case of Rom. 6 (Reynier, 2000:152).

Then, during baptism, the believer is involved not only in the death and burial of Christ, but also in His resurrection!  

2.4 Baptism in the first letter of Peter

R. Perdelwitz in 1911 and W. Bornemann in 1919 proposed a theory on this letter, which later has been recalled by others (Corsani, 19982:239):

«Up to 4:11 the scripture would be on the liturgy of a baptismal worship, with the celebration of baptism between 1:21 and 1:22. The exhortations of 1:22-23 should be read in this perspective. 1:22-25 would refer to the dedication of the baptized, followed by a hymn on the privileges of the faithful in his union with Christ (2:1-10) […] ».

Therefore, reading all or even just a big part of Peter’s first letter, it has been thought that it denotes a liturgy, a homily or a trait that had to do with baptism. Now, let us analyze some verses:

«20 Which sometime were disobedient, 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. 21 The like figure 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: 22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him».  


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68 Corsani (19982:239): «[…] Indeed, by baptism they were buried with Christ and raised with him. This new life has led to the forgiveness of sins (v.13)».

69 The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version.
The meaning is this: Baptism is not a purification of the body, but the request for an interior purification of the soul. What does this inner purification consist of? From what must the soul be purified? It must be purified from bad conscience. And how can the soul be purified from bad conscience? (Ricca, 2015:42):

«Through the forgiveness of sins. The request for "good conscience" is the request for the forgiveness of sins, that Christ obtained for us by in His death and resurrection. A good conscience cannot be given to man by himself, it can only be given to him by God, who give him Christ’s righteousness as gift».

Baptism itself does not confer good conscience, it represents only the request for it (Bigarelli, 2016:127-128):

«Baptism as a salvific action corresponds to the ancient salvation of Noah and his family. The association between baptism and resurrection (1:3) reflects the traditional Christian teaching that the act of passing through the baptismal ritual means that is necessary to personally identify with the crucified and risen Christ [...]. Baptism thus appears as the instrument rather than the agent of salvation, since God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead (1Pt. 1:21; 2:4) and through his resurrection (1:3) He gives new life and living hope to those who bear the name of Christ (2:5-24; 4:6), as attested throughout the New Testament».

Baptism represents a complete break with the past. Just as the flood70 swept away the old world full of sin, so baptism constitutes the interruption of a past life full of sin and the beginning of a new life in Christ (Walwoord, Zuck, 2002:903).

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70 Perkins (2015:74): «Instead of exploiting the common parallelism between the flood and the divine judgment (II Pious. 2:4-5), Peter I exploits a different typology: the flood refers to the water of baptism (v.21). The typology was widespread in the church of the origins». 
With these remarks, our survey and analysis of the most important New Testament baptism texts are completed. The next paragraph is devoted to a comprehensive summary, that is intended to serve the purposes of the central question of the dissertation, i.e. whether children were baptized in the early church.

2.5 Summary of New Testament texts

The witness of the New Testament clearly shows that the Christian community has practiced baptism from the beginning. Those who converted to the new faith, were welcomed into the community by baptism (Barth, 1987:13).

2.5.1 In the Gospels

According to the Gospels, the command to baptize does not go back to the historical Jesus, but originates in the risen Christ Jesus. In Matthew’s Gospel, unlike other passages in the Scripture, the baptismal formula is Trinitarian. This formula is the one that quickly imposed itself, because it has been attributed by the Evangelist Matthew to the risen Jesus and it obviously thus benefited from a unique authority.

Unlike rabbis, Christians do not make disciples of their own, nor will they incept a succession of teachers in a sequence dating back to Jesus as founder, but they will lead their converts to follow Jesus directly. He remains the only teacher (Mt. 23:9-10) and all those who follow Him, are his disciples. They have the task of obeying his teachings. Baptism is an element of the decision to follow Him and to acquire the condition of disciple. However, just as the ritual is not enough, if it is not accompanied by adequate instruction, the teaching
is likewise not enough, if there is not also a total immersion in the mystery of Christ (Michelini, 2013:468).

**2.5.2 In the Acts of the Apostles**

In the Book of the Acts conversion normally precedes baptism. With time, as the announcement and Christian terminology spreads, «faith» are mentioned more often than «conversion» (Barth, 1987:49). In Acts, the practice of baptism involves the use of water and immersion, either implicitly or in accordance with what is said. Christian baptism is ministered by a baptizer. It is a unique event and it is imparted in the name of Jesus Christ, which is a characteristic that can include the declaration of faith in Him.

Baptism was, according to Acts, always preceded by the preaching of the Gospel. The preaching called to faith in Jesus and repentance of sins. All conversion stories concern people of age, without certain indications that infants or children were included (Ferrario, 2008:111-112, Ferguson, 2014:17, 218, 231, Rinaldi, 2008:774, Toppi 1999:39-41). Regarding the meaning of baptism, it lies primarily in its connection with repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Acts. 2:38). It does not mean that baptism eliminates sin, but it is

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71 Due to the issue of the baptism of an entire home or family, where some believe that children were also involved, see the observations in 2.2.5.1.
72 «In the New Testament Baptism is adult baptism, initiatory, unrepeatable. […] It introduces to the eschatological community of salvation. […] In the first two centuries, the baptism ceremony was merging God’s action, The freedom of the person and the participation of the community; but in the Middle Age, with the practice of infant baptism, the free choice of the person was silenced and the community elements disappeared or were reinterpreted, and ritualism took over, engulfing these two aspects».
73 «In the fourth century mass conversion of whole populations and the open favour that the Christian faith profession had at the imperial courts favored deep transformations especially regarding the baptism celebration. In the Apostolic era, the ritual were the exterior testimony of the conversion to the faith in Jesus, of the new birth in a completely different and renewed existence; therefore, it intended to evince a choice and an individual and conscious commitment […]».
the sign and the proclamation to the baptized that his sins have been erased by Christ on the cross (Ricca, 2015:40).

2.5.3 In the theology of Paul

Paul takes baptism for granted as a common ground with his readers. He recalls the following aspects of baptism: baptism implies preaching and faith, but preaching and faith do not replace baptism (Ferguson, 2014:175). Paul associates baptism with the death and resurrection of Christ. The destiny of the believers in this way, is parallel to the destiny of Christ. By his death he died once and for all, so that, having been raised from the dead, he definitively escaped the kingdom of death. Likewise, believers, dying in their old existence, are also freed once and for all from the empire of sin. Besides being inducted into the death of Jesus, the believer also «puts on» Him. Christ is compared to a dress that the baptized puts on: in baptism, the person strips himself of his being and puts on Christ. Baptism not only introduces the believer into Christ, but also introduces him into his new body, that is the Church.

Paul places baptism not only in the context of Christ’s expiatory death, but also in the context of the response of faith. Baptism took place by immersion in water (Ferguson, 2014:195).

2.5.4 In the theology of Peter

According to Peter, baptism represents a complete break with the past. Just as the flood swept away the old world full of sin, so baptism constitutes the interruption of a past life full of sin and the beginning of a new life in Christ.
We are now ready to draw a conclusion on the question whether children were baptized according to New Testament textual witness.

2.6 Conclusion

The second chapter of our research traced New Testament details regarding baptism and infant baptism as testified in core texts. Baptism is a command, it was uncovered, established by the risen Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16). It is a sign of communion with Christ in his death and resurrection. In baptism, one testifies that one has been introduced into Christ (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27) and that she/he has received the remission of sins brought about by Christ (Mk. 1:4; Acts. 22:16) (Bolognesi, 2007:78-79). Baptism is also about abandoning oneself to God through Jesus Christ in order to walk in the newness of life (Rom. 6:2-4). Baptism is therefore an act of witness, of faith, of commitment and of obedience.

In the New Testament we, however, do not find a broad and satisfactory description of the rituals of the first Christian communities. This absence is presumably justified by the fact that all these rites were known, so it was not necessary to present them in detail. By comparing the data, it was possible to reconstruct the practice of baptism in the apostolic age. In this regard, the analysis of the New Testament passages revealed the constant presence of a structure that can be found both in some summary-texts and in the main baptismal reports of the Acts. This structure brings into play the succession of three elements: preaching, faith and the celebration of baptism.

74 Mk. 16:15 (see paragraph 2.1.2); Act. 2:38 (see paragraph 2.2.1); Eph. 1:13.
75 Act. 8:35 the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch performed by Philip (see paragraph 2.2.3); Act. 10:34-48 the baptism of Cornelius performed by Peter (see paragraph 2.2.5); Act. 16:25-34 the
Father Pierpaolo Caspani, who is a Catholic priest in the diocese of Milan and professor of sacramental theology at the Faculty of Theology in northern Italy, explains what is just said, with the following words (Caspani, 2016:14-15):

«The preaching has as its fundamental content the proclamation of the *kerygma* (that is, the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ), accompanied by a pressing call to conversion. The preaching is matched in a special way by faith, which implies both the acceptance of *Kerygma*, through the acceptance of Christ the Lord, and conversion following that adherence. On the basis of this faith, the ritual of baptism takes place, which the New Testament allows us to describe as an immersion in running water (of a river or a tub), preceded or accompanied by a solemn profession of faith, perhaps in the form of a dialogue between the one who baptizes and the one who is baptized. At first glance, such a structure seems to be intended for adult subjects, who are able to personally accept the preaching and adhere to it before receiving baptism. Therefore the fact that the baptismal celebration can also concern infants, that is, those who are not yet able to carry out an act of personal faith, would therefore seem to be a hardly sustainable hypothesis».

After analyzing the various cases of baptism conveyed in the New Testament, I have no doubt that these consequently concerned adults. In fact, there is no reference to pedo-baptism. On the contrary, it became clear that baptism was always preceded by a preaching of the Gospel. It, in turn, called to faith in Jesus and to repentance. These could only be responded to by adults. I therefore agree with those who believe that, when we speak of the baptism of an entire family (a subject dealt with in paragraph 2.2.5.1), children were not included. In conclusion a 

baptism of the jailer performed Paul and Sila (see paragraph 2.2.7); Act. 18:5-8 the baptism of Chrism and the first Corinthians (see paragraph 2.2.8).
meaningful sentence is summarized in Mk. 16:16: «He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned».

This conclusion ends our investigation of New Testament texts on baptism. In the subsequent chapters, we focus on selected texts from the initial Christian intellectual trajectory and reflection with the view to uncover their thinking on baptism and in particular on infant baptism. The next chapter exploits relevant texts from the second century.
CHAPTER III

BAPTISM IN THE SECOND CENTURY

The third chapter of our research traces the testimonies related to baptism that have come to us from a literary collection that is generally attributed to second century theologians, popularly identified as the “Apostolic Fathers”. In reality, they were only five in number: Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna and the Shepherd of Hermes (Ttreccani, VI, 1970:561). During the XVIII century, however, to that list the following names were added: “the fragments of Papias of Hierapolis” preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea, a text called Didaché or “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles” and the letter to Diogneto (dell’Osso, 2011:5-6).

Therefore, the term “Apostolic Fathers” does not indicate a collection of writings already collected and designated during the second century by this name, but rather constitutes a label used later by scholarship to define a particular collection of early Christian works. These works were produced in the first half of the II century. They thus reflect the context of the early Christian generations, their congregations and practices. These early works are of special interest, since they were composed at a time when the New Testament was not yet available as a well-defined corpus (dell’Osso, 2011:6).

These are writings within the Christian communities and therefore they are irreplaceable sources for understanding orientations.

76 dell’Osso (2011:5): «The name Apostolic Fathers defines those writings which are characterized by their antiquity and their connection with the apostolic age and which, for this reason, are a primary source for the study of early Christianity, especially in the sub-Apostolic age. (ca. 70-150 A.D.)».

77 Lenzuni (2011:5): «J. B. Cotelier has been in 1672 in the work: SS. Patrum qui temporibus apostolicis floruerunt […]». 
and characteristics related to the formation and nature of the Post-Apostolic Churches (Cattaneo, 2008:57). The authors are called Apostolic Fathers, since it is accepted that they were in person educated by the Apostles. Hence they received the authoritative recognition as fathers of the church that know and sat at the feet of Christ’s apostles.

In some of these writings of the Apostolic Fathers, as well as in other later authors of the II century, we find references to baptism. The analysis of these provides important indications of how baptism was ministered during that early historical period. The exposition below commences with the Didaché, followed by the letter of Barnabas, the shepherd of Hermas, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyons, all of whom referred to baptism. The chapter concludes with and overview of the period in which all the relevant material is synthetized.

3.1 The Didaché or “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles”

In 1873 the Metropolitan of Nicomedia, Filoteco Bryennios, discovered in Constantinople a Greek code written in 1056 A.D., that now is preserved in the Patriarchal Library of Jerusalem. It contained the Didaché or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (Clerici, 2005:13).

The standing of the Didaché in Christian antiquity is attested by Athanasius of Alexandria, who advises its use for the education of the catechumens and by Eusebius of Caesarea, who names it in his

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78 In paragraph 2.3.1 Athanasius of Alexandria and his literary genre of festive letters has already been presented. We read from the festive letter thirty-ninth (Atanasio, 2003:511-512): «[...] there are other books beside these, not canonized, but prescribed by the fathers to be read by those who have recently entered and want to be catechized about the subject of the righteous faith: [...] The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles [...]». (My translation from Italian – LT).
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ecclesiastical history, although he does not place it among the testamentary\textsuperscript{79} writings.

It seems that it dates back to a Syriac context, at the beginning of the second century,\textsuperscript{80} if not earlier. It is a very interesting document since it faithfully portrays the life and the organization of a Christian community that still has things in common with the Jewish tradition. The text gives ample space to moral precepts, rather than to doctrinal definitions. The communities that it reflects, besides having permanent leaders such as deacons and bishops, were also trained and guided by charismatic and itinerant ministers, called apostles and prophets (Rinaldi, 2008:458).

The first six chapters present the doctrine of the two ways, the way of life and the way of death, and they conclude with an exhortation to vigilance. Chapters seven to ten contain liturgical instructions on baptism, fasting, prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist. Chapters eleven to fifteen offer disciplinary instructions. Chapter sixteen is basically an eschatological invitation to be vigilant while awaiting the return of the Lord (dell’Osso, 2011:16).

\textsuperscript{79} Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea in Palestine from about 314 to his death in 339, can be recognized as the second Christian historian, while the first was Luke (Bruce, 2012:). We owe Eusebius for the information on the statements about the ancient writers of the Old and New Testaments. In a passage (\textit{Ecclesiastical History} III,25,1-7) in which he refers to the use of the writings of the New Testament in the churches of his time, he distinguishes three categories of books: recognized, controversial and spurious (with two further grades: illegitimate and heretical). Among the controversies, the \textit{Didaché} emerges. Eusebius of Cesarea (2005:\textsuperscript{2}:171-172): «Among the non testamentary writings are to be counted instead the Acts of Paul, the so-called Shepherd, the Apocalypse of Peter, the letter called Barnabas’, the so-called \textit{Didaché} of the Apostles […]». (My translation from Italian – LT).

\textsuperscript{80} Clerici (2005:13): «We know nothing for sure about the author and the year in which it was written. Most likely, this manual of instructions and customs of the early Church was written by a Christian from Judaism, that is one of those itinerant apostles that the \textit{Didaché} itself speaks about towards the end of the first century.» dell’Osso (2011:15): «The \textit{Didaché} is not a writing due to a single author, but a compilation of very ancient traditional texts dating back to the 50-60s and later assembled by an anonymous author no later than the end of the I century». 

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Chapter seven, made up of just four paragraphs, speaks of baptism. The *Didaché*, outside the New Testament, is the oldest testimony on the baptism that has come to us (Clerici, 2005:22-23):

«1 And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. 2 But if you have no living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot do so in cold water, do so in warm. 3 But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. 4 But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whoever else can; but you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before». *Didaché 7:1-4* (My translation from Italian – LT).

What can we learn from this ancient text? According to the *Didaché*, if baptism cannot be practiced by immersion, it can take place by pouring water three times on the head (note that in the baptisms told by the New Testament there is no trace of this practice), and by pronouncing the Trinitarian formula «in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit» (Ferguson, 2014:236).

It is remarkable that the task of baptizing is not entrusted to a minister, but to the community as a whole «with regard to baptism, so baptize».

The connection between this chapter and the other six preceding it, is very important for our analysis. The «precepts» that must be exposed «before», that is before baptism, are those contained precisely in the first section of the *Didaché*. It seems evident that a certain work of catechesis was meant to be a prerequisite for baptism. According to all evidence, the baptism of the believers who were previously
instructed in the Christian faith, is indicated (Ricca, 2015:70). This indication already rules out the possibility that the author of the work would consider the pedo-baptism, since children obviously cannot be educated according to the «way of life» or the «way of death». It is also a prerequisite that both the baptizer and the baptized have to fast before baptism. This also points in the direction of a tendency that excludes pedo-baptism (Ferguson, 2014:237).

The last reference to baptism in the Didaché occurs in chapter IX. It states (Clerici, 2005:25):

<<5 But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs». Didaché 9:5 (My translation from Italian – LT).

In this passage it is emphasized that baptism is, in turn, the prerequisite participating in the Lord’s Supper. The Christian path, clearly defined by the Didaché, is therefore constituted by the order: teaching, baptism, supper. It should, therefore, be accepted that in churches where the Didaché acted as catechetical educator, pedo-baptism was not practiced.

In the next paragraph the Letter of Barnabas is investigated regarding its reflection on baptism.

3.2 Barnabas’ Letter

Barnabas’ letter is a written document, belonging to the epistolary genre, which in the Early Church was considered by many to be part of the New Testament, i.e. an inspired writing (Tessore, 2010:5). The attribution of the letter to Barnabas, Paul’s companion, is indicated
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by Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* II: 6,31; 7:35; 20:116) as well as Origen (*Contra Celsum* 1:63). However, subsequent criticism, particularly from the XIX century, preferred a more prudent position by attributing the work to an anonymous master, who wrote it in the early decades of the second century (Cattaneo, 2008:68).

The oldest manuscript that contains the entire Letter of Barnabas is the Codex Sinaiticus of the fourth century (Lenzuni, 20011:75). It has been thought that it could have been composed in the Alexandrian environment, since Clement of Alexandria mentioned the work. Another view places its origin in Syria-Palestine or Asia Minor, for a series of alleged contacts with some theological traditions related to those environments are mentioned (dell’Osso, 2011:177).

The text consists of 21 chapters and it is divided into two parts. In the first part, (chapters 1-17), the author attributes to the Jews the inability to understand the Scriptures, since they have always interpreted them in a literal sense while, as Christians do, the authentic understanding of the Old Testament is possible only through an allegorical interpretation that allows us to grasp the spiritual sense of the Law as a prefiguration of Christ (Cattaneo, 2008:68). The second part, (chapters 18-21), recalls the moral catechesis of the *Didaché*, proposing the scheme of the two ways.

This text is very interesting for its structure and content, as well as for its antiquity, and for this reason it always enjoyed great fame and diffusion in the Church, even after it has been clearly defined as a text that was not part of the neo-testamentary canon (Tessore, 2010:6).

On baptism we read (dell’Osso, 2011:191):
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«This He saith, because we go down into the water laden with sins and filth, and rise up from it bearing fruit in the heart, resting our fear and hope on Jesus in the spirit. *And whosoever shall eat of these shall live forever;* He meaneth this; whosoever, saith He, shall hear these things spoken and shall believe, shall live forever». **Barnabas 11:11** (My translation from Italian – LT).

Baptism is therefore seen as a purifying action before the eyes of God. One immersed oneself «full of sins» and acquired a status of divine approval. It is clear that «descending into the water» implies a complete immersion (Ricca, 2015:71). It is in this regard important to underline that, if pedo-baptism were already a known practice, it would be difficult to reconcile it with another passage of this letter (Tessore, 2010:22):

«Forasmuch then as He renewed us in the remission of sins, He made us to be a new type, so that we should have the soul of children, as if He were recreating us». **Barnabas 6:11** (My translation from Italian – LT).

If pedo-baptism had already been a known practice, the status of the baptized and the child would have been the same, and, consequently, what would be the point of a comparison between the two? Vice versa, if the status of the child had been considered pure regardless of baptism, then the comparison of Barnabas would have made sense, in other words, the newly baptized are considered to be «recreated» as a newly born child.

These observations conclude our investigation of the Letter of Barnabas. The Shepherd of Hermas is now in our focus.
3.3 The Shepherd of Hermas

The Shepherd of Hermas is the most extensive script of the Christian production prior to the second half of the second century. It is a work that enjoyed extraordinary authority and spread in the ancient Church, to the point of being read, not only for private formation, but also in liturgical assemblies (Lenzuni, 2011:123). Due to its fame and appreciation it has been raised almost to the level of canonical status, like the other books of the New Testament. This status has been officially denied not before the *Decretum Gelosianum* (IV century) (Tessore, 2007:5).

According to the critics, the Shepherd is a work composed in a Roman environment in the middle of the second century. Meanwhile the Muratorian\(^81\) fragment confirms the name of the author, that was Hermas, and the place of composition, that was Rome. Furthermore, scholars accept that the work was written during the pontificate of Pope Pius, stating that Hermas was his brother, and in fact, we read that (Rinaldi, 2008:496):

«[...] In our times, recently Hermas wrote the Shepherd in the city of Rome, sitting on the chair of the Church of the same city as the bishop Pius, his brother; and certainly it is appropriate to read it, but it cannot be presented in Church in front of the people, neither as a prophet, since the number of these is now complete, nor as an apostle, having come too late».  

*Muratorian fragment* (My translation from Italian – LT).

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\(^81\) Rinaldi (2008:351,494): «The Muratorian canon is the oldest list of New Testament books considered to have been inspired. It consists of 85 lines of Latin text, probably translated from a Greek original. The document is contained in an VIII century codex from the monastery of Bobbio and it is now kept in the “Library Ambrosiana” in Milan, where it was discovered in 1740. It is believed that it has been written in Rome in the second half of the II century; its name derives from the discoverer Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750)».  

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If Bishop Pius, of whom the Muratorian fragment speaks, was Pius I, then Hermas wrote his work between 140 and 155 (dell’Osso, 2011:231).

The work is divided into three parts: five Visions, twelve Precepts and ten Similarities. The central theme is the problem of the remission of sins, committed after baptism. The ancient Church experienced for some centuries the tension between a rigorous trend, according to which the only remission of sins occurs with baptism, and a view that is open to granting forgiveness at least once before death, without excluding any kind of sin, not even the sins of murder, adultery and apostasy (Cattaneo, 2008:67). Hermas is in favor of the second option, which will then be the one followed by the majority of the churches.

This writing, which among the Apostolic Fathers is the one that contains the greatest number of passages linked to baptism, offers us interesting insights. The image of the Church as a tower appears in what is probably the oldest part of the Shepherd (Tessore, 2007:27-28,32):

«3 The tower which you see building is myself, the Church […] 5 I asked her, “Why was the tower built upon the waters, O Lady?” […] Hear then why the tower is built upon the waters. It is because your life has been, and will be, saved through water. For the tower was founded on the word of the almighty and glorious Name and it is kept together by the invisible power of the Lord». The Shepherd of Hermas IIIª Vision 11:3,5 (My translation from Italian – LT).

«3 Do you wish to know who are the others [stones] which fell near the waters, but could not be rolled into them? These are they who have heard the word, and wish to be baptized in the name of the Lord; but when the chastity demanded by the truth comes into their recollection, they draw
back, and again walk after their own wicked desires». The Shepherd of Hermas IIIª Vision 15:3 (My translation from Italian – LT).

The waters on which the tower is built are a symbol of baptism which, throughout the work, is also designated by the writer with the word «seal» (Tessore, 2007:124):

«The seal, then, is the water: they descend into the water dead, and they arise alive. And to them, accordingly, was this seal preached, and they made use of it that they might enter into the kingdom of God». The Shepherd of Hermas IXª Similitude 16:4 (My translation from Italian – LT).

The act of baptism involved entering or descending into the water. Baptism was the consequence of listening to the Word and it was administered in the Name of the Lord. It was preceded by repentance and therefore it was a baptism of conversion (Ferguson, 2014:251). The text never speaks of pedo-baptism, but everything seems to move in the opposite direction, in fact, it is written that the one, after receiving the «seal» of baptism, sins but then repents (Tessore, 2007:137-138):

«2 […] For although any of them be tempted by the most wicked devil, and commit sin, he will quickly return to his Lord. 3 I deem you happy, I, who am the messenger of repentance, whoever of you are innocent as children, because your part is good, and honorable before God». The Shepherd of Hermas IXª Similitude 31:2-3 (My translation from Italian – LT).

As in Barnabas’ letter, here too the parallelism between the condition of the innocence of a child and that of a newly baptized person, can be observed. In other passages of the Shepherd of Hermas one can see how people are encouraged to maintain after baptism a state of purity such as that of children (Tessore, 2007:124):
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«He said to me, be simple and guileless, and you will be as the children who know not the wickedness that ruins the life of men». The Shepherd of Hermas I° Commandment 2:1 (My translation from Italian – LT).

Analyzing these passages, it is clear that this work suggests that pedo-baptism was not practiced. What was the views of Ignatius of Antioch? In the next paragraph his work is considered.

3.4 Ignatius of Antioch  

Eusebius of Caesarea informs us (Ecclesiastical History, Book III: 22,33,36) that Ignatius lived during the time of Trajan (98-117), and that he would have held the seat of Antioch after Bishop Evodio, who in turn had been constituted pastor of the metropolis of Syria by the same apostle Peter. Ignatius was martyred under the emperor Trajan around 110 (Cattaneo, 2008:64).

His epistolary is a precious source from countless points of view, because it allows us to enlighten and understand theology, liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline and thus in practice reconstruct the life of the Church in the very first years of the second century A.D. (Lenzuni, 2011:107).

Ignatius, concerning baptism, shows interest in who should administer it. In fact, in his letter to the Church of Smyrna, he writes (Tettamanzi, 2017:112):

«Without the bishop it is not lecit to baptize or celebrate the agape; but what he approves is pleasing to God, so that all that is done may be safe and valid». (My translation from Italian – LT).

Therefore, Ignatius does not give us indications on the baptizandes but on the one who is allowed to administer baptism. This faculty is
reserved to the bishop, at least he must be present, otherwise, who baptizes must have his proxy (Ricca, 2015:72). Nothing related to pedo-baptism is said.

3.5 Justin Martyr

Justin, the philosopher and martyr, was born in Naplusa, the ancient Sichem, in Samaria, around 100 A.D. He converted to Christianity after attending various philosophical schools. Later he moved to Rome where he opened a school of Christian philosophy. He has been accused of being a Christian by Crescente, a pagan colleague, and therefore he suffered martyrdom around 165 under the reign of Marcus Aurelius (Cattaneo, 2008:65).

In that period the Judeo-Christian Churches saw their influence diminish in the face of the expansion of Christianity born of Paul, because now the majority of Christians came from paganism (Lièbaert, 2013:40). In this way the Church, leaving her original environment, meets the cultural world of Hellenism, with which confrontation was inevitable and indispensable. And it is in this situation that the attempt of cultural mediation that Justin wanted to make between philosophy (mainly Stoic and Platonic) and the Christian faith, is important. In fact, he was the first to face the Greek thought and for this reason he was a kind of inspirer of the Apologist Fathers (Rinaldi, 2008:439). First, he defended Christians from popular accusations, then he committed himself, with a clear and rational method, to expose the main doctrines, the right conduct and cultural customs (Von Campenhausen 2005:20). He was a very fruitful author but unfortunately, of his works only the
anthologies and the Dialogue with Triffon have been preserved\(^{82}\) (Gandolfo, 2004:23).

The first relatively broad description of Christian baptism occurred in his work. It is described in his first apology, in chapters 61, 65 and 66 (Gandolfo, 2004:117-119):

> «1 I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ; lest, if we omit this, we seem to be unfair in the explanation we are making. 2 As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. 3 Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. 4 For Christ also said, «Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven» […]».

> 6 […] over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe; he who leads to the layer the person that is to be washed calling him by this name alone. 8 And this washing is called «illumination», because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings. And in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Ghost, who through the prophets foretold all things about Jesus».

Iº Apology 61:1-4,6,8 (My translation from Italian – LT).

Justin offers a rich baptismal theology, which, according to Prof. Ricca, revolves around two cornerstones (Ricca, 2015:77):

\(^{82}\) Rinaldi (2008:438): «The texts of the Greek apologists of the II century were transmitted to us by the Codex Parisinus Graecus 451, written in 914 by Areta archbishop of Cesarea in Cappadocia». 
«the first is repentance and forgiveness of sins, which seem to precede baptism, but are asked for in prayer and obtained in close relation with baptism; the second is the regeneration that takes place with baptism, and which is indispensable to enter the kingdom of God (61:4)».

From this citation it seems evident that a certain work of catechesis was intended as a prerequisite for baptism. According to all evidence, this is the baptism of the believers who previously have been instructed in the Christian faith (Von Campenhausen 2005:21). Baptism was for those who had adhered to the Christian teaching, those who had placed their trust in it and promised to live a Christian life (61:2). The text emphasizes the voluntary acceptance of baptism and the practice of free will by the candidate (Ferguson, 2014:273).

This fact already tends to rule out the possibility of a pedo-baptism, since children cannot be educated and subsequently «believe that the teachings exposed are true». Further confirmation comes a little later in chapters 65 and 66, where Justin speaks of the Eucharist (Gandolfo, 2004:123-124):

«1 But we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptized [illuminated] person, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. 2 Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. 5 And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine […]».

*Apology 65:1-2,5* (My translation from Italian – LT).
After baptism, the participants return to the place where other Christians had gathered in prayer. After the exchange of a kiss of greeting, follows the Eucharist, which represents the acceptance of the person into the fellowship of the Church. In accordance with his apologetic intent, Justin repeatedly emphasizes the moral life expected from Christians (65:1) (Ferguson, 2014:274).

Justin’s introduction of his treatment of the Eucharist summarizes the way in which he interprets the meaning of baptism (Gandolfo, 2004:124-125):

«I And this food is called among us Eukaristia, of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined». *Apology 66:1* (My translation from Italian – LT).

According to Justin (66:1) faith, baptism for the remission of sins and the new life lived according to the teachings of Christ, identify a Christian. It is to be observed that here faith is not towards the person of Christ, but in the Christian teachings (Ferguson, 2014:276). Surely it concerns an adult person, previously educated in the Christian faith and there is no trace of pedo-baptism (Ricca, 2015:77).

We can conclude briefly by stating that, according to Justin, the events of Baptism and the Eucharist are closely linked (65:5; 66:1). The newly baptized enters the Christian community and with participation in the Eucharist, she/he seals her/his membership in the Church of the Lord with the new brethren, the community (Gandolfo, 2004:36). Baptism is preceded by a consistent catechesis (61:2; 66:1), by fasting (61:2) and takes place according to the Trinitarian formula (61:3). All
the clues exclude a pedo-baptism. The text throughout indicates an adult person, previously educated in the Christian faith and able to fast (Ricca, 2015:77).

The last theologian from the second century to consider is Irenaeus of Lyons. The following paragraph is devoted to his views on baptism.

3.6 Irenaeus of Lyons

Irenaeus was born in Izmir around 130 and there he met Polycarp who was a disciple of John the Apostle. In 177 we find him as a presbyter of the Church of Lyons (Gaul), where he succeeded Bishop Potinus, who died in prison because of persecution that same year (Cattaneo, 2008:105). The date of Irenaeus’s death is not known, nor is the way he died, although a tradition of the fifth century reports that he was martyred by the heretics around 200 when that he was about 70 years old (Cosentino, I, 2009:7-8).

He was of a generation later than Justin’s and he was influenced by his theology, yet he never had the desire to be a philosopher, but to be a guardian of the authentic apostolic tradition (Von Campenhausen 2005:23). Irenaeus was therefore first and foremost a shepherd and it was essentially pastoral concerns that induced him to write his works (Lièbaert, 2013:58).

His main commitment was in the field of the polemic against the Gnostics and his main work is dedicated to this subject, On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis, better known as Adversus haereses. Irenaeus is to be considered the most vivid theologian of his time, he has laid the foundations for an organic
arrangement of Christian doctrine that lasted well beyond his death (Rinaldi, 2008:451).

He has little to say about the baptismal ceremony. What really interests him is to oppose the Gnostics. Irenaeus, however, presupposes a period of preparation before baptism, in fact we see him talking about it, since in some accounts of the Acts of the Apostles baptism is imparted immediately. For example, concerning the episode in which Peter baptizes Cornelius and those of his house (Acts 10), Irenaeus says (Cosentino, II, 2009:74):

«[…] would he have given them baptism so readily, had he not heard them prophesying when the Holy Ghost rested upon them. And therefore did he exclaim, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? […]». Adversus haereses III 12:15 (My translation from Italian – LT).

Moreover, in the case of Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch (Cosentino, II, 2009:230), he observed:

«[…] For nothing else [but baptism] was wanting to him who had been already instructed by the prophets: he was not ignorant of God the Father, nor of the rules as to the [proper] manner of life, but was merely ignorant of the advent of the Son of God, which, when he had become acquainted with, in a short space of time, he went on his way rejoicing, to be the herald in Ethiopia of Christ’s advent. […]». Adversus haereses IV 23:2 (My translation from Italian – LT).

It is not clear whether Irenaeus is dealing with a problem that arose towards the catechesis in preparation for baptism and that therefore he is defending it, or whether he is simply explaining why in
the scriptures there are cases of immediate baptisms (Ferguson, 2014:240).

Irenaeus affirms with determination the importance of faith for salvation (Adversus haereses IV 2:7) and adds that conversion, repentance and obedience are also needed (Adversus haereses I 10:1; IV 40:1, 41:3; V 16:2). For this reason he presupposes to baptism a profession of faith that has been previously well taught (Cosentino, 2009:105):

«[...] he also who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism». Adversus haereses I 9:4 (My translation from Italian – LT).

For Irenaeus regeneration was a more general concept of the baptism that was connected to it, but some scholars see in one of its passages a clear reference to the practice of pedo-baptism. The passage in question is as follows (Cosentino, 2009:263):

«For He came to save all through means of Himself — all, I say, who through Him are born again to God — infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men». Adversus haereses II 22:4 (My translation from Italian – LT).

The text states that «all [...] are born again to God — infants, and children [...]». Irenaeus has no doubt that the spiritual rebirth also includes newborns and children. For this reason, the theologian Benedetto Testa affirms (Testa, 2007:155):

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83 Baptism is Trinitarian (Demonstratio apostolicae praedicationis 3:6-7).
84 Full professor of dogmatic and sacramental theology at the Theological Institute of Ancona (Italy), member of the Pontifical Lateran University and lecturer at the Faculty of Theology of Lugano (Switzerland).
«[…] Irenaeus of Lyon’s testimony is clear: he refers to the baptism given to the children to confirm how Jesus saved everyone through his work».

The famous theologian of the Church of England, William Wall, states that the term rebirth is used by Irenaeus to indicate baptism (Wall, 2016²:269):

«Ireneus, who is the eldest of the Fathers in whom the pedo-baptists have as yet found any positive mention of in ants as baptised, does not at that place use the word itself, baptised, but the word regenerated, or born again […]».

In his monumental three-volume work, patristic scholar Johannes Quasten also believes that Irenaeus is referring to the baptism of children (Quasten, 2000²:255):

«[…] Irenaeus, is the first in ancient Christian literature to bear witness to the baptism of children».

However, there is no shortage of opposing opinions such as those of the theologian Kurt Aland (Arduini, 2010:66):

«It does not seem obvious to me what Irenaeus has in mind here, and certainly there is no thought about the baptism of infants; he only argues about the fact that Jesus sanctified all humanity because he was made like everyone else, living through all ages of life and that he was an example to all […]».

Even Professor Everett Ferguson, analyzing in-depth the entire context in which Irenaeus’ passage is inserted, has difficulty in believing that it is about the baptism of children (Ferguson, 2014:345):

«Can this be the first mention of the baptism of children? […] It is better to be prudent […]. The coming of Jesus brings a second beginning for the whole human race. He sanctified every age of life. Accepting this renewal
by receiving baptism is another matter, which falls outside the scope of the passage».

In short, for the supporters of pedo-baptism, Irenaeus’ statement about the innocence of children is problematic (Ferguson, 2014:346), since those who are similar to innocent children are the ones who are saved (Cosentino, II, 2009:247):

«[…] who are they that have been saved and received the inheritance? Those, doubtless, who do believe God, and who have continued in His love; […] and innocent children, who have had no sense of evil. But who are they that are saved now, and receive life eternal? Is it not those who love God, and who believe His promises, and who in malice have become as little children? (1 Cor. 14:20)». Adversus haereses IV 28:3 (My translation from Italian – LT).

In conclusion, the context in which Irenaeus affirms that passage, which for some is a clear reference to pedo-baptism, is actually centered on the event of Christ’s baptism. However, it cannot be excluded that the reference to the «rebirth in God of newborns and children» did not mean their baptism, even if Irenaeus did not explain the practice (Arduini, 2010:66):

«The passage is therefore to be considered ambiguous: neither of the two arguments (against or pro pedo-baptism) seems to have sufficient argumentative weight to prevail over the other».

Our investigation of the reflection of Irenaeus concludes the survey of the second century. To summarize our findings, a synthesis of the views concerning baptism during this century is offered next, before we conclude this chapter.
3.7 Summary of the baptism in the second century

The Christian intellectual trajectory, produced during the second century A.D., reflected the context and thinking of the early Christian generations. In some of these writings, both of the so-called Apostolic Fathers as well as in other later authors of the II century, we find references to baptism.

3.7.1 Didaché or “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles”

The baptism according to the Didaché, if it cannot be practiced by immersion, can also be performed by pouring three times water on the head, utilizing the pronounced Trinitarian formula «in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost» (Didaché 7:3) (Ferguson, 2014:236).

In the text it is very clear that a certain work of catechesis was intended as a prerequisite for baptism (Didaché 7:1). Accordingly, its teaching about baptism is about the baptism of believers, previously instructed in the Christian faith (Ricca, 2015:70).

It is also prescribed that both the baptizing and the baptized have to fast before baptism (Didaché 7:4). This is also evidence that excludes pedo-baptism (Ferguson, 2014:237). Baptism in turn is a prerequisite for participation in the Lord’s Supper (Didaché 9:5).

The Christian way, well outlined, is therefore constituted by this order: teaching, baptism, supper. In short, we have to conclude that everything suggests that in churches where the Didaché was accepted, pedo-baptism was not practiced.
Baptism in early Christianity:
A critical investigation of relevant Christian writings (80 – 325 A.D.)

3.7.2 Epistle of Barnabas

Baptism in the epistle of Barnabas is seen as a purifying action before the eyes of God. One used to immerse oneself «full of sins» (Barnabas 11:11) and gained a status of divine approval. It is clear that «we descend into the water» involves complete immersion (Ricca, 2015:71).

The newly baptized are considered to be «recreated», that is, as a newly born child (Barnabas 6:11). If pedo-baptism had already been a known practice, the status of the baptized and the child would have been the same, and therefore what would be the point of a comparison between the two?

3.7.3 The Shepherd of Hermas

This text, among the Apostolic Fathers, is the one that contains the greatest number of passages regarding baptism. We have seen that baptism involved the act of entering and descending into the water (The Shepherd of Hermas IX, Similitude 16:4). Baptism was the consequence of listening to the Word and was administered in the Name of the Lord. It was preceded by repentance and was therefore a baptism of conversion (Ferguson, 2014:251).

As in Barnabas’ letter, here too we notice the parallelism between the condition of innocence of a child and that of a newly baptized person (The Shepherd of Hermas IX Similitude 31:2-3). In some of passages of the Shepherd of Hermas one can see how people are urged after baptism to maintain a state of purity like that of children (The Shepherd of Hermas I° Precept 2:1.).
Baptism in early Christianity:
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3.7.4 Ignatius of Antioch

His epistolary is a precious source from countless points of view, because it allows us to enlighten and understand theology, liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline and thus in practice reconstruct the life of the Church in the very early years of the second century A.D. (Lenzuni, 2011:107). Ignatius does not give us indications on the baptizandes, but on the one who baptize. This faculty is reserved to the bishop (letter to the Church of Izmir), at least he must be present, or who baptizes must have his proxy (Ricca, 2015:72).

3.7.5 Justin Martyr

The first relatively extensive description of Christian baptism, as it took place around the middle of the second century, is described in Justin’s first Apology in chapters 61, 65 and 66. According to Justin the events of Baptism and the Eucharist are closely linked (1st Apology 65:5; 66:1), the newly baptized enters the Christian community and with the participation in the Eucharist seals, with the new brethren, her/his membership in the Church of the Lord (Gandolfo, 2004:36). Baptism is preceded by a substantial catechesis (1st Rev. 61:2; 66:1), by fasting (1st Rev. 61:2) and it takes place according to the Trinitarian formula (1st Rev. 61:3).

This is, according to all evidence, the baptism of believers previously educated in the Christian faith (Von Campenhausen, 2005:21). In short, all the indications exclude that the practice of pedo-baptism was practiced, since it is always spoken of an adult person, previously educated in the Christian faith (Ricca, 2015:77).
3.7.6 Irenaeus of Lyon

Irenaeus has little to say about the baptismal ceremony. What really interests him is to oppose the Gnostics. Irenaeus, however, presupposes a period of preparation before baptism, in fact, we see him talking about it, since in some accounts of the Acts of the Apostles, baptism is imparted immediately.

Irenaeus affirms with determination the importance of faith for salvation (Adversus haereses IV 2:7) and adds that conversion, repentance and obedience are also needed (Adversus haereses I 10:1; IV 40:1, 41:3; V 16:2). That is why he presupposes to baptism, which is Trinitarian, a profession of faith that has been previously well taught (Adversus haereses I 9:4).

Some scholars see in some of its passages a clear reference to the practice of pedo-baptism, however, other scholars are of the opposite opinion. If we want to have a prudent attitude, we can say that the passage is to be considered ambiguous because: «neither of the two arguments (against or pro pedo-baptism) seems to have sufficient argumentative weight to prevail over the other» (Arduini, 2010:66).

3.8 Conclusion

Based on our reading of the above-mentioned sources, we have to conclude that during the second century Christians were baptized by total or partial immersion. They were adults, adequately prepared by a substantial baptismal catechesis (Ricca, 2015:81). Not a single theologian wrote explicitly on pedo-baptism. However, some scholars see in a passage of Irenaeus a reference to pedo-baptism. With precaution, we have considered this passage to be ambiguous because
neither of the two arguments (against or pro pedo-baptism) seems to have enough argumentative weight to prevail over the other.

In the next chapter we continue our investigation regarding the central question of the research. This implies that the intellectual trajectory created by Christian scholars during the third century will be carefully studied.
CHAPTER IV

DIFFERENTIATED VIEWS AND THE INCORPORATION OF CHILDREN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRD CENTURY

The impact of the Christian faith, during the third century, tended to spread evenly in almost all the provinces of the Roman Empire located around the Mediterranean. Its influence was no longer confined only to a certain geographical area and was not limited to a certain social class, and in some areas, it was even beginning to present itself as a true mass phenomenon. During that century, in an alternation of moments of persecution and periods of peace (197-249, 260-303), the Christian communities were involved in a process of transformation both from the organizational and doctrinal points of view. The issue of the Person of Jesus, e.g., had unique urgency both from the human and divine point of interpretation (Rinaldi, 2008:566).

Scholars recognize unanimously that the first three centuries of Christian history are quite complicated to reconstruct historically because there are no direct testimonies or sources that can give us an idea of what the Christianity was really like during those centuries (Filoramo, 2006:204-5). Some information is obtained through the writings that circulated within the communities (Rinaldi, 2008:552-553), but unfortunately, they have the following limits: they deal with specific topics of community life; they tend to be quite partial for the perspective they offer; they just concern the Christianity of some geographical areas.

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85 Filoramo (2006:204): «This diffusion was fostered not only by the possibility of moving by sea or, more slowly, along the great river ways, but also by the extraordinary road and communication system that distinguished the Roman Empire». 
It is precisely on some of these writings that we find references to the subject that concerns us, that is, to baptism and infant-baptism in the early church. In comparison to the earlier theological reflection on the issue, as discussed in the previous chapter, views on baptism since c. 200 AD represent a development of thinking, a trajectory in which theological and ecclesial differentiation surfaced. This development at the beginning of the third century delineates this, the fourth chapter of our study. The objective is to demarcate this differentiated development. For this purpose, three prominent theologians are selected: Tertullian, Hippolytus and Origen. Their views illustrate the change in thinking. And, they were at the core of ecclesial and theological thinking at the time.

4.1 Tertullian

Tertullian (Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus) was born in Carthage around 155 A.D. from quite well-off parents. His father was an official in Rome and boasted the title of «proconsular centurion» (Dattrino, 2016:118). Tertullian studied law and probably practiced the legal profession in Rome, where between 190 and 195 he converted to Christ and adopted the Christian faith and its community. Then he traveled to Greece and, perhaps, Asia Minor (Bolognese, 2007:78-79). In 197 he returned to Carthage where he married and became a priest in the local church (Von Campenhausen, 2005:183).

86 For the Romans, Africa was the territory that extended around Carthage and it was called Africa Proconsularis because it was governed by a proconsul. The African culture of those centuries was bilingual, that is, Greek-Latin. This bilingualism was also reflected in the Christian community. The administration was exclusively Roman, so the Latin element increasingly prevailed (Cattaneo, 2008:115).

87 Lièbaert (2013:78): «According to Jerome, Tertullian was a priest but he never made any allusion in this regard or claimed any mandate in the Church».
Baptism in early Christianity:
A critical investigation of relevant Christian writings (80 – 325 A.D.)

Tertullian was one of the most important Christian writers of that period, if not even the greatest. His writing art, as well as his stylistic mastery, are of an undisputed talent, which have made him the apologist par excellence. He exerted a great influence on posterior theology (Ricca, 2015:83). In 207 he adhered to Montanism. He died between 220 and 225.

Tertullian was the first Christian author to mention unequivocally the baptism of children. He does so in his work entitled De Baptismo (Concerning Baptism). The script was probably written between 198-200, although most scholars think it originated a few years later, between 200 and 206. It was, in any case, completed before his commitment to Montanism (Carpin, 2011:9). In De Baptismo we can discern the following logical-literary structure:

A – Introduction (chapter 1).

B – Three main parts of the work:

1. Theology of Baptism (chap. 2-9).

2. Discussed theological issues (chap. 10-16).

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88 Its literary production dates back to the period from 197 to 220. It is difficult to attribute an exact date to all his works, so it is easier to group them by topics, that is: apologetic, polemical, doctrinal, disciplinary (Rinaldi, 2008:533).

89 In a period between 151 and 171 A.D. in Phrygia, a region of Asia Minor, a recently baptized Christian named Montano began to prophesy and he was soon joined by two prophetesses, Prisca (or Priscilla) and Maximilla (Filoramo, 2006:192). This charismatic phenomenon, which began with Montano and his companions, became soon a very popular mass phenomenon. It opposed the growing worldliness of the church, the progressive hierarchy of ministers and the marked tendency of the clergy to monopolize sacred Scripture (Ricca, 2015:83). This movement was characterized by an eschatological component. Those who were part of it, believed that the end of the world was near. To prepare for such imminent events, one had to live a life marked by rigorous morality and strong ascetic traits (Labanchi, 2007:13-14). The mountain movement, although condemned by the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.), had a certain influence in para-ecclesial movements also in the following centuries (Bolognesi, 2007:471).

90 Tertullian wrote this work to counteract the position of a second century Christian Gnostic group: the Cainitis. These, like other Gnostic sects, believed that the God of the Old Testament was inferior to the Supreme God.
3. Practical indications (chap. 17 -20,4).

C – Brief conclusion (chap. 20,5).

For Tertullian, baptism is the heart of the Christian experience. It is, therefore, significant to disclose the salient features of his theology. Leaving aside some points, such as the immersion in water (De Baptismo 7:1-2) and the Trinitarian formula (De Baptismo 6:1-2), that are in common with tradition, we will analyze the four aspects that in our opinion are the most significant. These are: the concept of a sacrament, baptismal water, the administration of baptism and the baptism of children.

4.1.1 The Concept of the sacrament (sacramentum)

At the very beginning of his treatise (1:1), Tertullian defines baptism as the «sacrament of water» (sacramentum aquae).

«1. De sacramento aquae nostrae qua ablutis delictis pristinae caecitatis in vitam aeternam liberamur […]». De Baptismo 1:1.91

«1. This treatise on the sacrament of our water by which, by washing the sins of the previous blindness we are freed for eternal life […]». De Baptismo 1:1 (My translation from Italian – LT).92

The term sacramentum takes on different meanings in Tertullian’s writings, two of them represent the cornerstones of his theology. The first is «oath», like the expression utilized in the military field where it was used to swear loyalty to the commander, in the sense of obligation and commitment to military service (Grün, 20127:13).

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91 Critical text CCL 1 (Carpin, 2011:122-123).
92 Ibid.
This was, therefore, also true in the religious sense, indicating the subject’s commitment to adhere to faith, or to observe the dictates of a religion (Carpin, 2011:39). The second meaning that sacramentum can have for Tertullian is close to the currently well-known «sign of a sacred thing», that is, a reference to a ritual to indicate religious celebrations or sacred symbols that express the hidden content of a mystery (Ibid., pp.39-40).

Tertullian’s thought seems to oscillate between these two meanings, preferring one now, and the other later (Ricca, 2015:91).

**4.1.2 Baptismal water**

According to Tertullian, baptismal waters are both sanctified and sanctifying:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>«4. Igitur omnes aquae de pristina originis praerogativa sacramentum sanctificationis consequuntur invocato deo. supervenit enim statim spiritus de caelis et aquis superest sanctificans eas de semetipso et ita sanctificatae vim sanctificandi conbibunt». De Baptismo 4:4. (^{93})</th>
<th>«4. Therefore, by virtue of the ancient privilege of origin, all waters, once has been invoked by God (on them), they obtain the power to sanctify. Immediately, in fact, the Spirit comes from heaven, and remaining on the waters it sanctifies them with his presence, and so once sanctified they are imbued with the power to sanctify». De Baptismo 4:4 (My translation from Italian – LT). (^{94})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

However, even if the waters are sanctified, they are not the substance that transmit the Holy Spirit: they prepare the neophyte to

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\(^{93}\) Critical text CCL 1 (Carpin, 2011:136-137).

\(^{94}\) Ibid.
receive it, through a rite that immediately follows baptism, which consists of anointing with oil and the laying on of the hand (probably done with the right hand):

«1. Exinde egressi de lavacro perungimur benedicta unctione de pristina disciplina qua ungui oleo de cornu in sacerdotium solebant ex quo Aaron a Moyse unctus est; unde christi dicti a chrismate quod est unctio quae etiam domino nomen accommodavit [...].

1. Dehinc manus imponitur per benedictionem advocans et invitans spiritum sanctum [...].

3. Tunc ille sanctissimus spiritus super emundata et benedicta corpora libens a patre descendit superque baptismi aquas tanquam pristinam sedem recognoscens conquiescit columbae figura delapsus in dominium [...].

De Baptismo 7:1; 8:1,3.95

«1. Then, having come out of the wash-house, we are anointed with a blessed anointing according to the ancient practice, according to which they used to anoint (the chosen men) for the priesthood with oil poured from the horn; that is the oil with which Aaron was anointed by Moses. Therefore, we are called «Christians» by the chrism that is an anointing, which also gave this name to the Lord [...].

1. Then the hand is laid by invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit by means of a blessing [...].

3. Then that Most Holy Spirit willingly descends from the Father on the hulled and blessed bodies, and rests on the waters of baptism almost recognizing in them his ancient seat; he who descended on the Lord in the form of a dove [...]. De Baptismo 7:1; 8:1,3 (My translation from Italian – LT).96

We thus notice two novelties in Tertullian’s writings. The first is that the rite of baptism takes place in two distinct moments: the actual baptism and the subsequent anointing with oil and laying on of the hand.

95 Ibid., pp. 148-150, 152-155.
96 Ibid.
The conferral of the Spirit therefore takes place during the baptism and it represents a second moment of baptism that is directly connected to the rite of anointing.

The second novelty is the attribution of a sanctifying power to the baptismal waters. It is an idea that is absent not only in the New Testament, but also in the earliest Christian reflection on baptism (Ricca, 2015:89), as indicated in chapter three above.

4.1.3 The administration of baptism

Concerning the administration of baptism, Tertullian writes the following:

«1. Superest ad concludendam materiolam de observatione quoque dandi et accipiendi baptismi commonefacere. Dandi quidem summum habet ius summus sacerdos, si qui est, episcopus; dehinc presbyteri et diaconi, non tamen sine episcopi auctoritate [...].

2. Alioquin etiam laicis ius est: quod enim ex aequo accipitur ex aequo dari potest [...]». De Baptismo 17:1-2. 97

«1. To conclude this brief treatise, it remains to recall the established practice of giving and receiving baptism. Certainly, the high priest, that is the bishop, if he is present, has the high right to administer it; then the priests and deacons, not without the authorization of the bishop [...].

2. In addition, the laity also have this right. In fact, what is received on an equal footing can be conferred [...]». De Baptismo 17:1-2 (My translation from Italian – LT). 98

He openly declares that lay Christians also have the right to baptize, since the baptism received, can also be given. This right, however,

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97 Critical text CCL 1 (Carpin, 2011:180-183).
98 Ibid.
cannot be exercised without the authorization of the bishop «episcopi auctoritate». It should be made clear, however, that Tertullian by the term “laics” indicates a person of the male gender, therefore, women are excluded (17:4-5).

4.1.4 Baptism of children (paruulos)

As far as the baptism of children is concerned, Tertullian clearly advises against it:


«4. Therefore, considering the condition, the disposition and the age of each person, the postponement of baptism is more useful, especially in the case of children. In fact, what is the need, if not strictly necessary, to expose even the godparents to the danger of not keeping their promises in case of death or of being frustrated (in their commitment) by the development (in children) of a bad nature? 5. Certainly the Lord said: Do not hinder them from coming to me. So let them come, but when they are older, when they are able to learn, when they are taught the One to whom they come; let them become Christians when they are able to know Christ! Why does this innocent age hasten to receive the remission of sins? In earthly things one is more cautious; why are earthly goods...

99 Ibid., pp.188-189.
entrusted to those who are not entrusted with earthly goods entrusted to divine ones? May they be able to ask for salvation, so that you may know that you have given it to those who have asked for it». De Baptismo 18:4-5 (My translation from Italian – LT).  

Tertullian has been the first theologian to speak in explicit, but critical, terms about the baptism of children. We can, therefore, accept that this type of baptism was already being administered in his day. Since he raised this problem we can assume that the phenomenon had already reached considerable proportions. What were the reasons adopted by Tertullian to advise against the baptism of children and recommend its postponement?

The first is that children have not yet sinned. Baptism erases sins and it does not exist in children; therefore, the question is why they should be baptized. Tertullian is to be counted among the first Christian authors who affirmed the innocence of children «innocens aetas» (18:5), that is, a condition that makes the baptism of children incompatible with his idea of the function of seeking the forgiveness of sins that is generally associated with baptism (Ferguson, 2014:423). Evidently Tertullian ignores the doctrine of the original sin, which later played a decisive role in the spread of infant baptism (Ricca, 2015:90).
The second reason is that this type of baptism obliges the godparents to promises that they may not be able to keep: why make them take this risk?

The third reason is that it is better that, whoever becomes a Christian through baptism, becomes one based upon having knowledge of Christ. Moreover, it is better that salvation is given to whoever asks for it. In fact, for Tertullian, baptism is a means of salvation (Ricca, 2015:90).

In his treatise Tertullian testifies to us that the practice of the catechumenate already appears as a compulsory and a common stage of the baptismal journey. For those who intended to enter baptism, «ingressuros baptismum»¹⁰² (20:1), there was a period of doctrinal formation, but above all, moral and spiritual preparation «instruens tam eos qui cum maxime formantur»¹⁰³ (1:1).

Speaking of children (18:4), Tertullian uses the term «paruulos», since they are the ones who can already understand something, while the term «infantes» indicated children who cannot yet speak. This is the reason why he opted for «paruulos», instead of «infantes». It is not by chance that the main reason given by Tertullian to defer baptism to children, is precisely the fact that they are not able to know Christ and to adhere to his teaching with full awareness of faith (18:5). For baptism, one must wait for the person to recognize sin and therefore feel the need to repent to obtain salvation (Ferguson, 2014:423).

¹⁰² Critical text CCL 1 (Carpin, 2011:192).
¹⁰³ Ibid., pp.122,124.
The baptism of children appears as a common and uncontested practice imposed by the Church and, given the particularity of the subjects, it could not be preceded by a real catechumenate, although this remains the ordinary way of access to baptism. At the same time, there is also a pastoral concern to confer baptism, not only on those who are truly aware of and responsible for a choice of Christian life, but also on children in case of «etiam periculo ingeri»\textsuperscript{104} (18:4). Therefore, Tertullian argues in favor of the practical consideration of «necessity» or «emergency baptisms».\textsuperscript{105}

4.1.5 Conclusion

Tertullian’s *De Baptismo* has a specifically doctrinal and disciplinary character, and was compiled in response to the heresy he intended to counteract. However, it provides us with some valuable data on Christian initiation and on the baptismal liturgy in Carthage at the beginning of the third century, since the doctrinal dispute is linked to liturgical practice (Carpin, 2011:60).

According to Tertullian, baptism is an action of God that erases sins and confers the Spirit (4:4; 7:1; 8:1-3). It is considered as the «sacrament of faith» (1:1), which is both a vow and a consecration to God. The catechumenate at the time was well established as a compulsory stage for baptism (1:1; 20:1) and the latter takes place by immersion (7:1-2) and with the Trinitarian formula (6:1-2).

\textsuperscript{104} Critical text CCL 1 (Carpin, 2011:189).
\textsuperscript{105} Professor Everett Ferguson, after a careful analysis of the sepulchral inscriptions referring to children or infants from the end of the second century until the fourth, believes that these are cases whose disease constituted a danger of death. In the next chapter, this subject will be examined deeply.
The baptism of children was already practiced in churches, although Tertullian advised against it and recommended that it be delayed until the time when the baptized person will be aware of the presence of faith (18:4-5). Ultimately, Tertullian did not contest the value of baptism of children in itself. His pastoral concern, rather, demanded that, such a radical act of consequence in someone’s life, should be preceded by adequate preparation. Carpin (2011:106) observed:

«What worried Tertullian was man’s response to God’s grace, his fidelity to his commitments, the consistency of the baptized to the sacrament received, the seriousness of Christian life».

4.2 Hippolytus of Rome

Hippolytus of Rome (c. 175 – c. 236) was a Greek theologian and a writer and disciple of Irenaeus (Treccani, 1970:339). It is assumed that his origins were neither Roman nor Latin, but Eastern. This is due to «his surprising knowledge of Greek philosophy» (Arduini, 2010:77). We know, thanks to Eusebius of Caesarea (Ecclesiastical History, Book VI: 20),\(^{106}\) that he was a bishop, but we do not know exactly the seat or location of this episcopate.

Hippolytus was an inflexible opponent of the Bishop of Rome, Callisto, since he considered the latter’s bearing on penance and marriage as too lenient. It is now common opinion that Hippolytus pushed his opposition until the creation of a schism that lasted until 235. He has been the first anti-pope in history (Dattrino, 2016:112).

\(^{106}\) Eusebius of Caesarea; II, (2005²:40): «[...] In the same way, Hippolytus, also was a bishop of another Church in another region». 
The ascension to the imperial throne of Maximinus, the Thracian (Gaius Iulius Verus Maximinus), an enemy of the Christians, led to the contemporary arrest of both Hippolytus, reconciled with the church, and of Ponziano, the new bishop of Rome. In 235 they were both deported to Sardinia and condemned to work in the mines. Then both died martyrs of the faith (Treccani, VI, 1970:340). Pope Fabian, who succeeded Ponziano, had their bodies brought to Rome. In 1551, in the area of the ancient cemetery of the Via Tiburtina (Rome), a statue was discovered and it was recognized for that of Hippolytus:

It is currently kept in the atrium of the Vatican Apostolic Library. The Easter cycles from 222 to 233 are engraved on one of the sides of the chair on which the bishop sits, while the other side contains a list of works. The comparison between this list and the various catalogues

107 He was a Roman emperor from 235 until his death in 238. He was the first barbarian to reach the imperial purple, thanks only to the consent of the legions. He was born without Roman citizenship, and without even being a senator. He was also the first emperor to never walk into the city of Rome, as he spent his three years of reign engaged in victorious military campaigns.

108 Until today it is known as the «cemetery or catacombs of Ippolito». 
attributed to Hippolytus, seems to confirm that it is precisely him. However, there is no lack of discordant opinions (Tatteo, 2010:15).

There are many works attributed to Hippolytus, as evidenced by the list on the statue. However, on its authenticity there is not always an agreement among the opinion of scholars (Dattrino, 2016:112). There are, in fact, several hypotheses on the authorship of the writings, and the matter is generally referred to as the enigma of Hippolytus (Rinaldi, 2008:541).

Our research limits itself to the analysis of the «Apostolic Tradition» that is attributed to Hippolytus and was written around 215 A.D. This is undoubtedly the most important testimony on the life and liturgy of the early Christian community after the Didaché (Arduini, 2010:78). Hippolytus was a great supporter of tradition and was opposed to any innovation. He believed that the church is an assembly of saints, faithful heirs and based on respectful apostolic principles. He described these in his book, convinced that the possession of the truth prevents errors and heresies (Tatteo, 2010:29).

His book represents the internal organization, the articulation of ministries, the liturgical life and the moral canons of the Christian community of the West at the beginning of the third century. The work is first of all a text of liturgy and it refers to the consecration of the bishop, to the celebration of worship and to the Eucharist. The latter has

\[109\] Until a century ago, only the title of this work was known because it was present in the list of the statue, but the text was considered lost. However, the research carried out by E. Schwarts and R.H. Connoly, independent but in agreement with the conclusions, allowed to identify the work with the Constitution of the Egyptian church preserved in the Egyptian Synod and, partially, also in a Latin manuscript of the library of Verona in Italy (Tatteo, 2010:27). This is not, of course, the original Greek text. But this translation, in fact, constitutes two testimonies, one Latin, the other Eastern.
been destined to have had great influence especially in the West. It included an exposition of the administration of baptism with all the details of the rite (Dattrino, 2016:114).

There are two very interesting paragraphs related to baptism: the first (Apostolic Tradition Chapter 16) comprises a list of professions or, within a profession, the list of the activities those who wanted to be baptized, had to reject. The second is the complete ritual of the celebration of baptism. The passages are very interesting, therefore, instead of reporting the most significant part, we will cite the text almost in full.

4.2.1 Professions and trades to give up in order to be baptized

In chapter 16 of his book on the Apostolic Tradition, Hippolytus wrote the following on professions and trades to be given up in order to be baptized (Tatteo, 2010:76-77):

«Inquiry shall likewise be made about the professions and trades of those who are brought to be admitted to the faith. If a man is a pander, he must desist or be rejected. If a man is a sculptor or painter, he must be charged not to make idols; if he does not desist he must be rejected. If a man is an actor or pantomimist, he must desist or be rejected.\(^{110}\) A teacher of young children had best desist,\(^{111}\) but if he has no other occupation, he may be permitted to continue. A charioteer, likewise, who races or frequents races, must desist or be rejected. A gladiator or a trainer of gladiators, or a huntsman [in the wildbeast shows], or anyone connected with these shows, or a public official in charge of gladiatorial exhibitions must desist or be rejected. A heathen priest or anyone who tends idols must desist or be rejected.\(^{110}\) Christians considered the theatre was considered as a place and a means of spreading pagan culture and customs.\(^{111}\) This prohibition is justified by the fact that the teachings are based on pagan authors.\(^{111}\)
rejected. A soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill men and to refuse to do so if he is commanded, and to refuse to take an oath; if he is unwilling to comply, he must be rejected. A military commander or civic magistrate that wears the purple must resign or be rejected. If a catechumen or a believer seeks to become a soldier, they must be rejected, for they have despised God. A harlot or licentious man or one who has castrated himself, or any other who does things not to be named, must be rejected, for they are defiled. A magician must not [even] be brought for examination. An enchanter, an astrologer, a diviner, a soothsayer, a user of magic verses, a juggler, a mountebank, an amulet-maker must desist or be rejected. A concubine, who is a slave and has reared her children and has been faithful to her master alone, may become a hearer; but if she has failed in these matters she must be rejected. If a man has a concubine, he must desist and marry legally; if he is unwilling, he must be rejected. If, now, we have omitted anything (any trade?), the facts [as they occur] will instruct your mind; for we all have the Spirit of God. Apostolic Tradition chap. 16: Professions and trades (My translation from Italian – LT).

From the analysis of this text we can make three conclusions. The first is that this series of prohibitions were not meant for candidates for baptism, but for those who wanted to be admitted as catechumens, that is, for those who had to begin a three-year course of education that, if successfully concluded, would open the doors to baptism (Ricca, 2015:94).

The second consideration is that this paragraph clearly shows us how much the need for and emphasis on sanctification was alive in the church of that time. Hippolytus leaves no doubt; the Church is a society of saints and no concession is allowed for human weakness. Tatteo underlines this ecclesiastical approach. He wrote (Tatteo, 2010:41):

112 See Apostolic Tradition chapter 17. The duration of instruction after examination of trades and occupations.
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«In this attitude come together the prudence made necessary by the countless defections that occurred during the persecutions, the concern of Christianity to distinguish itself as much as possible from the surrounding paganism and above all the conviction that catechesis as an education is not pure intellectualism, but initiation into a new life, for the effectiveness of which the Church herself feels responsible […]».

The third consideration is that the verb «is postponed» does not imply a definitive exclusion.

4.2.2 The ritual of baptism

In chapter 21 in his book on the Apostolic Tradition is devoted to the administration of holy baptism. Hippolytus wrote (Tatteo, 2010:80-83):

«At cockcrow, prayer shall be made over the water. The stream shall flow through the baptismal tank or pour into it from above when there is no scarcity of water; but if there is a scarcity, whether constant or just sudden, then use whatever water you can find. They shall remove their clothing. And first baptize the little ones; if they can speak for themselves, they shall do so; if not, their parents or other relatives shall speak for them. Then baptize the men, and last of all the women; they must first loosen their hair and put aside any gold or silver ornaments that they were wearing: let no one take any alien thing down to the water with them. At the hour set for the baptism the bishop shall give thanks over oil and put it into a vessel: this is called the “oil of thanksgiving”. And he shall take other oil and exorcise it: this is called “the oil of exorcism”. [The anointing is performed by a presbyter.] A deacon shall bring the oil of exorcism and shall stand at the presbyter’s left hand; and another deacon shall take the oil of thanksgiving, and shall stand at the presbyter’s right hand. Then the presbyter, taking hold of each of those about to be baptized, shall command him to renounce, saying: «I renounce thee, Satan, and all thy servants and all thy works». And when he has
renounced all these, the presbyter shall anoint him with the oil of exorcism, saying: «Let all spirits depart far from thee». Then, after these things, let him give him over to the presbyter who baptizes, and let the candidates stand in the water, naked, a deacon going with them likewise. And when he who is being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, shall say thus: «Dost thou believe in God, the Father Almighty?». And he who is being baptized shall say: «I believe». Then holding his hand placed on his head, he shall baptize him once. And then he shall say: «Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the quick and the dead?» And when he says: «I believe», he is baptized again. And again he shall say: «Dost thou believe in [the] Holy Ghost, and the holy church, and the resurrection of the flesh? » He who is being baptized shall say accordingly: «I believe», and so he is baptized a third time. And afterward, when he has come up [out of the water], he is anointed by the presbyter with the oil of thanksgiving, the presbyter saying: «I anoint thee with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ». And so each one, after drying himself, is immediately clothed, and then is brought into the church. Then the bishop, laying his hand upon them, shall pray, saying: «Lord God, who hast made them worthy to obtain remission of sins through the laver of regeneration of [the] Holy Spirit, send into them thy grace, that they may serve thee according to thy will; for thine is the glory, to the Father and the Son, with [the] Holy Spirit in the holy church, both now and world without end. Amen». Then, pouring the oil of thanksgiving from his hand and putting it on his forehead, he shall say: «I anoint thee with holy oil in the Lord, the Father Almighty and Christ Jesus and [the] Holy Ghost». And signing them on the forehead he shall say: «The Lord be with thee»; and he who is signed shall say: «And with thy spirit». And so he shall do to each one […]. *Apostolic Tradition chap. 21: Administration of Holy Baptism* (My translation from Italian – LT).
The paragraph continues by describing the rest of the ceremony.

The newly baptized are admitted to the prayer, and there is the exchange of peace through a kiss with the other brothers and finally they can participate in fellowship.\footnote{An in-depth analysis of this text indicates the following:}

An in-depth analysis of this text indicates the following:

1. Baptism was preceded by a three-year catechumenal journey (chapter 17).
2. Baptism included an exorcism of which there is no trace in the New Testament.
3. Baptism and Communion formed a single event in the liturgy.
4. Baptism was followed by an anointing with oil by the priest and then another anointing by the Bishop, which also imposed his hands on the baptized.
5. Baptism took place by triple immersion, each of which was preceded by an article of faith in the triune God to whom the neophyte replied each time: «I do believe». This practice was a novelty with respect to the New Testament.
6. The ordinary form of baptism was by immersion.
7. For the first time, the baptism of children was practiced, since it had been incorporated in the practices, and the ritual was the same as that of adults. It was also specified that for those children who were too young, and therefore unable to answer baptismal questions, the parents should answer in their place: «the parents or someone in the family». This is very significant because if a

\footnote{The term to refer to the Lord’s supper is communion and in the two species there is bread and watered-down wine (i.e. mixed with water).}
Paladin of tradition like Hippolytus does not oppose all this, we can assume that the ritual was now part of the tradition.

4.2.3 Conclusion

As we have already observed in our study of Tertullian, Hippolytus also carried into the administration of baptism a kind of splitting it into two distinct rites: immersion in water and anointing with oil. The latter, in the West, would later become a ceremony, far in time removed from baptism, called «confirmation» in the Roman Catholic sphere, and «affirmation», but with a different meaning, in the Protestant sphere (Ricca, 2015:98).

The catechumenate, in terms of the exposition of Hippolytus, is an obligatory stage to be covered before baptism (chap. 17). Baptism takes place by immersion (chap. 18) and with the Trinitarian formula (chap. 18). Baptism concerns all the believers and the children, or rather, it is better to say: the believers and the children of believers of all ages, including infants (chapter 18). Finally, the rigor with which candidates for baptism are prepared to become members of the church is striking. In particular, it not only includes the scope of knowledge of the content of the Christian faith, but also, and equally so, the terms and condition of a lifestyle completely different from the previous life (chap.16-18).

The last paragraph of the current chapter unveils the views of Origen on baptism.
4.3 Origen

This great exegete was born in Alexandria between 183 and 186 A.D. from a family that was certainly already Christian. He died as a martyr in 253 A.D. (Morocco, 1971:295). He was the son of a martyr, in fact, his father Leonidas died in 202 A.D. during the persecution by Septimus Severus. After the confiscation of his father’s property, he was forced to provide for the sustenance of his mother and his six younger brothers, devoting himself to teaching. In 203 A.D., when he was just eighteen, he became a master of catechesis at the invitation of the bishop of the city, Demetrius (Dattrino, 2016:118).

For Origen, it was an opportunity to dive passionately into the study of sacred Scripture and Philosophy. After about ten years of teaching, the success of his course was such, that he had to divide the education into two cycles: one elementary for beginners, entrusted to his assistant Eracla, and one advanced, taught by himself (Cattaneo, 2008:136-137). He combined teaching with rigorous asceticism, which increased his prestige and gave him the nickname of «Adamantine» (that is, he who has the properties of a diamond: hard, pure, shining, precious) (Marocco, VI, 1971:296).

While he was in Caesarea of Palestine, around the age of 45, he was ordained a presbyter, by some bishops who were his friends, without the permission of Bishop Demetrius. This caused him to be declared deposed and expelled from the congregation of Alexandria. Pope Ponziano confirmed these measures. He was then received in Caesarea in Palestine by Bishop Theoctisto114 and there he opened a school based on the type of that of Alexandria. He spent the rest of his

114 He was the one who ordered him to be a presbyter.
life there teaching and preaching (Dattrino, 2016:118). During the persecution of Decius (249/251) he was imprisoned and tortured because of his faith, and then he died shortly afterwards.

First, Origen was a great Biblicist, perhaps the greatest of the patristic period. He was the first to approach the Bible with the philological mentality, taking care to establish the accuracy of the text (Cattaneo, 2008:137). His Hexapla was a powerful work. It was a synopsis of the Old Testament arranged in six columns: the first two were occupied by the Hebrew text and by a transliteration into Greek; the other four reported the main Greek versions circulating at the time: the LXX, Aquila, Theodoxy and Symachus (Lièbaert, 2013:78).

The literary production of Origen is enormous. Epiphanius of Salamis (315 c.a. - 403 A.D.) in his work Adversus omnes haereses (64, 63) speaks of six thousand works. We know that it should be far less than that. Already at the time of Gerolamo (347 - 419/420) in his epistle number 33, only 800 titles are mentioned (Morocco, VI, 1971:299). The disappearance of many of his writings is due both to the controversies he had with Rome and Alexandria and to persecution.

In his works two lines of thinking on baptism can be identified. The first relates to his theology and ministry concerning baptism. The second is his views on children and baptism. In the subsequent paragraphs both lines are explained.

4.3.1 Theology of Baptism

There is no great work of Origen dedicated solely to baptism, but he dealt with the subject in a parallel way by talking about something

«The Lord was baptized. The heavens were opened and «the Holy Spirit descended upon Him» [Lk.3:22]. He thundered a voice from heaven and said: «This is my beloved Son in whom I am pleased» [Lk.3:22]. We would say that at the baptism of Jesus the heavens were opened for the purpose of forgiving sins. Not of him, «who committed no sin, nor was there any deception in his mouth» [1 Pt. 2:22]. The heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit came down for the forgiveness of the sins of the whole world. Then the Lord «ascended upward, leading slavery to slavery» [Eph. 4:8] and fed us the Spirit. The Spirit had come to Him and He gave the Spirit at the time of His resurrection, when He said, «Receive the Holy Spirit. If ye forgive any man his sins, they will be forgiven him» [Jn. 20:22-23] ».


For Origen, there is an association between baptism and forgiveness of sins (Klein, 2010:58-59). In one of his homilies he applies to Christian baptism the image of the baptism of John the Baptist, as described in Luke 3:3 and he makes a call for repentance to the catechumens (Ferguson, II, 2014:471):

«[...] is the Lord our savior. In him we are baptized with true water, saving water. Baptism is also preached «for the remission of sins». Come, catechumens! Repent, so that then baptism will come for the forgiveness of sins. Those who stop sinning receive baptism «for the forgiveness of sins». In fact, if someone comes to the wash still sinning, he does not receive the

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115 Marocco (1971:300): «With Origen the genre «homily», understood as an explanation of the Scriptures in the context of the liturgical assemblies, acquires great depth. He wrote 574 of them, of which 300 have come down to us». 
forgiveness of sins [...]. He spends some time in a good life. Keep worlds from all stains and all vices. Your sins will be forgiven when you yourselves begin to despise your sins». Homily on Luke (My translation from Italian – LT).

In the illustration of two other verses, always linked to the baptism of John the Baptist (Lk. 3:7-8), he repeats to the catechumens the importance of repentance (Ferguson, II, 2014:483):

«Whoever remains in his original condition and does not leave behind his customs and habits does not come to baptism conveniently [...]. Thus, all that [John] tells them, he also tells you, men and women, catechumens! You are preparing to come to baptism [...]. If you do not drive out from your hearts the wickedness and the poison of the serpent, [you are threatened with future wrath]. To you who come to baptism, the scripture says, «Produce worthy fruits of repentance». Homily on Luke (My translation from Italian – LT).

Origen thinks that the effectiveness of baptism depends on the repentance and the choice that each one makes to (re)direct her/his way of living (Klein, 2010:60). Origen says in his homilies that it is not by chance that Matthew (Mt. 3:11), in describing the baptism of John the Baptist, uses the expression «for conversion» (Ferguson, II, 2014:483):

«Only Matthew adds «for conversion» wanting us to understand that the benefit of baptism depends on the choice of who is baptized: whoever converts obtains it, while instead it will make the judgment harder for whoever behaves differently». Homily on Luke (My translation from Italian – LT).

Therefore, for Origen repentance is the indispensable requirement to receive baptism, which must take place according to the Trinitarian formula (Ferguson, II, 2014:486):
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«[…] such is the authority and dignity of the substance of the Holy Spirit that the baptism of salvation is not fully realized except for the authority of the Trinity above all, that is, for the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and that the name of the Holy Spirit is added to the name of God the unborn father and of his only Son». Homily on Matthew (My translation from Italian – LT).

Origen defines it as «baptism of salvation» because of the Trinitarian authority. Moreover, baptism makes one enter the Church. He, in fact, illustrates this view in his lessons on Genesis 2:15 (Ferguson, II, 2014:478):

«[…] those that are generated again through divine baptism are brought into Paradise, that is, into the church […]». Comment on Genesis Book III (My translation from Italian – LT).

4.3.2 Baptism of children

Origen speaks of the baptism of children in three interconnected steps. All three answer questions related to the justification of the baptism of children for the remission of sins, and the author proposes a defense based on a mark related to birth, citing passages from the Old Testament (Ferguson, 2014:425-426):

«[…] Christian brothers and sisters often ask a question. The passage from the scripture I have read today encourages me to deal with it again. The little ones are baptized «for the forgiveness of sins». Whose are these sins? When have they sinned? How can we keep this explanation of the baptismal bath in the case of the little ones, unless we share the interpretation of which we spoke earlier? «No man is free from stain, even if his life on earth lasted only one day» [Job 14:4-5]. Through the mystery of baptism the machine of birth is taken away. For this reason the little ones are also baptized. For «if we are not born of water and of the Spirit we cannot enter the kingdom of
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heaven» [...]». Homily\textsuperscript{116} on Luke (2:22) (My translation from Italian – LT).\textsuperscript{117}

«[after citing Psalm 51:5 and Job 14:4],\textsuperscript{118} these verses can be quoted when one asks why, according to the practice of the church, baptism is also administered to infants, since the baptism of the church is imparted for the remission of sins; for if there is nothing of the infant that has to do with forgiveness and mercy, the grace of baptism would be superfluous». Homily\textsuperscript{119} on Leviticus (12:2-7) (My translation from Italian – LT).\textsuperscript{120}

«[before citing Leviticus 12:8]\textsuperscript{121} but for what sin is that pigeon offered? Perhaps the newborn child has already been able to sin? Yet he hath a sin for which it is commanded to offer a sacrifice, and of which it is said that no one is exempt, even if his life was of one day [Job 14:4-5]. Therefore, concerning this sin, one must believe that David also said what we mentioned above: «In sins you have conceived me as a mother» [Psalm 51:5]: for according to history no sin of his mother is made known. That is why the church also received from the apostles the tradition of administering baptism to children as well. They knew, in fact, those to

\textsuperscript{116}According to the research of Prof. Ferguson, the homilies were preached in Caesarea between 231 and 244 A.D.
\textsuperscript{117}The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord». Luke 2:22
\textsuperscript{118}The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me». Psalms 51:5; «Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one». Job 14:4.
\textsuperscript{119}According to the research of Prof. Ferguson, the homilies were preached in Caesarea between 238 and 244 A.D.
\textsuperscript{120}The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and borne a man child, then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled. But if she bears a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days. And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest: who shall offer it before the Lord, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood. This is the law for her that hath borne a male or a female». Leviticus 12:2-7.
\textsuperscript{121}The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, an the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean». Leviticus 12:8.
whom were entrusted the secrets of the divine mysteries, that in each one there are innate stains of sin, which must be washed by water and the Spirit; and because of them also the body itself is called «body of sin» [...]». Comment on the Romans (6:5-6) (My translation from Italian – LT).

In these citations Origen reiterates the conception that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, and that it was a problem for the practice of baptizing newborns. He faced, and reflected upon, both the questions concerning the practice of baptism of infants and the argument that was put forward against it, namely that newborns have no sins that should be forgiven by baptism (Klein, 2010: 60). The subject of discussion must have been more the question of why infants are baptized, rather than why not to baptize them.

Origen proposes a change concerning the innocence of children. In a passage from his Homilies on Luke, he counter-poses sin (which Jesus did not have) and mark. And he explains that Jesus needed the purification, recounted by Luke 2:22, because of the mark implicit in having taken a human body for the salvation of men (Ferguson, II, 2014:426-427):

«[...] any soul that has covered a human body has its own stain». Homily on Luke (My translation from Italian – LT).

Origen therefore explores the categories of impurities and contaminations present in the Old Testament Act (Klein, 2010: 61). The same impurity attributable to the birth of Jesus applies to all human

122 According to according to the research of Prof. Ferguson, these homilies on Romans belong to the mature works of Origen and were preached in Caesarea around 246.
123 The Bible (2008), Authorized King James Version: «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. For he that is dead is freed from sin». Romans 6:5-6.
beings. The commentary of the letter to the Romans makes it clear that Origen applies the same way of understanding sin as a physical mark.

Origen’s unique contribution is to extend baptismal forgiveness of sins to the ceremonial impurity, particularly to the one associated with the birth of the child (Klein, 2010:61). However, it is still too early to talk about hereditary sin. That is a matter that would instead find a more robust theological argumentation in Augustine of Hippo (Ferrario, 2008:112-113).

In his defense on the baptism of children, Origen appeals to a «tradition that comes from the apostles», but he does not provide any documentation of this statement. As often has happened in the history of Christianity, Origen’s statements indicate that the baptism of children preceded doctrinal justification (Ferguson, II, 2014:427).

4.3.3 Conclusion

According to Origen there is an association between baptism and forgiveness of sins (Klein, 2010:58-59). Repentance is the prerequisite for baptism, and baptism must take place according to the Trinitarian formula. He calls it «baptism of salvation» and through it one has access to the church that represents Paradise. While for Hippolytus, as we have seen, baptism also concerns the children of believers of all ages (including newborns), whereas according to Origen's theology, baptism takes on a less restrictive function.

There is no longer any distinction between children of believers and non-believers. Baptism is indispensable even for newborns who have only one day of life, therefore the issue is now another: «[…] No man is free from stain, even if his life on earth lasted only one day […]»
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(Homily on Luke 2:22). Origen explains that as Jesus needed purification, as written in Luke 2:22, because of the stain implicit in having taken a human body, the same thing applies to all human beings (Comment. on the Romans 6:5-6).

All men are born with this stain, which is why in Origen's theology baptism plays an indispensable role even for newborns. However, it is still too early to speak of hereditary sin that will instead find a more robust theological arrangement with Augustine of Hippo (Ferrario, 2008:112-113).

4.4 Conclusion

Based on an analysis of the applicable parts of the works of three leading theologians at the beginning of the third century, Tertullian, Hippolytus of Rome and Origen, we have to conclude that differentiated views and the incorporation of children in the rites of baptism, now surfaced in Christian writings. This differentiation came at a time when the Christian faith spread to almost all the provinces of the Roman Empire around the Mediterranean. Christianity was no longer confined only to a certain geographical area and for a certain social class, in some areas it was even beginning to present itself as a true mass phenomenon.

Tertullian was the first Christian author to unequivocally mention the baptism of children. He does so in his work written around 198-200 A.D. entitled De Baptismo. For him, baptism is the heart of the Christian experience. It is an action of God that erases sins and confers the Spirit (4:4; 7:1; 8:1-3). He also considered baptism as the «sacrament of faith» (1:1). This constitutes a new element in baptismal thinking. According to him this sacrament is both an oath and a consecration to God. The establishment of the catechumenate already
appears as a compulsory stage for baptism (1:1; 20:1), the latter taking place by immersion (7:1-2) and in terms of the Trinitarian formula (6:1-2).

At the time, baptism of children was practiced in churches, but Tertullian advises against it and recommends that it be delayed until the time that the baptized would be in a position to confess her/his faith (18:4-5). Ultimately, Tertullian does not contest the value of the baptism of children. He rather is led by a pastoral concern. The radical life changing act of faith should be preceded by adequate preparation.

Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition* (215 A.D.), certainly widely used in Carthage, Alexandria of Egypt, Syria and Palestine, reflects the practice of a well-defined church such as that of Rome. It represents the most explicit and complete testimony relating to Christian initiation in the third century (Caspani, 2016:20). The catechumenate is an obligatory platform for baptism (chap. 17), the latter takes place by immersion (chap. 18) and with the Trinitarian formula (chap. 18). Baptism concerns all believers and children, or rather believers and children of believers of all ages, including newborns (chap. 18). Finally, the rigor with which candidates for baptism are prepared to become members of the church is striking, not only in terms of knowledge of the things of the faith, but also and equally in terms of a lifestyle completely in opposition to the previous ways of living (chap. 16-18).

Origen is one of the greatest theologians and exegetes of all time. He also reflected on baptism.

There is no great work of Origen dedicated solely to baptism, but he deals with the subject. According to his thought, there is an
association between baptism and forgiveness of sins (Klein, 2010:58-59). Repentance is the prerequisite for receiving baptism, which must take place according to the Trinitarian formula. He calls it «baptism of salvation» and through it, one has access to the church that represents Paradise.

There is an interesting development regarding the baptism of children. While for Hippolytus, baptism also concerns the children of believers of any age (including newborns), according to the theology of Origen instead, baptism assumes a less restrictive function. There is no longer any distinction between children of believers and non-believers. Baptism is indispensable even for newborns who have only one day of life, the question is now another: «[…] No man is free from stain, even if his life on earth lasted only one day […]» (Homily on Luke 2:22).

Origen explains in his commentary on the letter to the Romans that as Jesus needed purification, recounted in Luke 2:22, because of the stain implicit in having taken a human body, the same applies to all human beings (Comment. on the Romans 6:5-6). All men are born with this stain, which is why in the theology of Origen baptism plays an indispensable role even for newborns. However, it is still too early to talk about hereditary sin that will instead find a more robust theological argumentation with Augustine of Hippo (Ferrario, 2008:112-113).

We have now concluded the fourth chapter of our study. It should be clear by now that at the beginning of the third century, different emphases and views on baptism emerged in Christian thinking. Children of Christians were provisionally incorporated in these trajectories of thinking. After 250 views on baptism had to be clarified. At synodical meetings it was tabled. In the next chapter we trace this
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development, still with the central question of our study in mind: the baptism of children.
CHAPTER V

SYNODICAL DECREES ON THE BAPTISM OF CHILDREN
UNTIL THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA 325

The last chapter of our research covers the period between 250 and the Council of Nicaea A.D 325. The chapter commences with the written legacy of Cyprian. During his time as bishop of Carthage (about 248-258), he was one of the main protagonists in three controversies at the time, related to baptismal practices: baptism administered by heretics or schismatics, emergency baptism (i.e. given in bed to the sick) and baptism of children. His exposition on these issues is fundamental to our study. The second part of the chapter engages the decisions of subsequent synodical meetings of ecumenical councils.

5.1 Cyprian

Caecilius Cyprian was born around 210 A.D. in Carthage, from a rich family that was not Christian. He died as a martyr of the faith in 258 A.D. during the persecution of the emperor Valerian. He studied Latin, Greek and rhetoric, but he did not possess such a deep knowledge of jurisprudence as Tertullian (Datirino, 2016:128). For a time, he worked as a master of rhetorical art.

His conversion to Christianity in 245 A.D. is due to the encounter in the city with a presbyter called Caecilius, from whom he took his

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124 Carpin (2007:7): «Those who profess heresy are called heretics, that is, they profess a doctrine contrary to a truth of faith proposed as a norm by the Church. While those who promote or follow a schism, are called Schismatics, that is, those who separate themselves from the Church not because of differences of a doctrinal nature, but because of contrasts of a disciplinary, liturgical or juridical nature».

125 Quasten (2009:2:577): «On 14 September 258 he was beheaded at Carthage. He was the first African bishop to be martyred». 
second name. The first consequence of the conversion was the decision to deprive himself of his assets and donate them to the poor (Cattaneo, 2008:121). In 249 A.D., after the death of Bishop Donato, he was elected Bishop of Carthage by popular demand and acclamation (Treccani, III, 1970:238).

In 250 the persecution of Decius took place. All the subjects of the emperor were obliged to manifest, through a formal act, their loyalty to the gods of the Roman Empire. Christians had to renounce their faith (Laboa, 2008:34). Property was confiscated from those that refused to do so. They were punished by exile or forced labor in the mines. The clergy of the different churches were the most affected, because they were obliged to deliver to the authorities all the books and sacred objects. It seems that the death penalty was reserved only for bishops (Dattrino, 2016:129).

There were many apostasies, even among some members of the clergy. When the persecution ceased, due solely to the death of Decius (251 A.D.), the question rose of how to re-admit the lapsi\footnote{\textit{Lapsi} was the Latin term used in the third and fourth centuries to indicate Christians who, under the threat of persecution, carried out acts of worship of pagan gods. Rinaldi (2008:556): «The reactions of Christians to this persecution were varied. On the one hand, there were the martyrs and on the other the apostates and the latter were numerous: there were the \textit{lapsi} and the \textit{sacrificed}. The first were those who had denied the faith; the second were defined as such being the ones who burned incense or made sacrifices. Then there were the \textit{libellatics} who bribed officials with money and had saved themselves by buying the libel, but without really sacrificing it».}\textsuperscript{126} into the communion of the church. Cyprian maintained a balanced demeanor of firmness and understanding (Council of Carthage 251 A.D.)\textsuperscript{127} (Von Campenhausen 2005:210).
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Cyprian’s literary activity is closely linked to the events of his life and time. All his writings focus on specific circumstances and they are intended for practical purposes (Von Campenhausen 2005:211). Cyprian was a man of action. He cared more for the direction of souls than for theological speculation (Dattrino, 2016:128). In addition to is many works, 81 letters are also extant.¹²⁸

5.1.1 Theology of Baptism

Among Cyprian’s writings there is no great work dedicated in particular to baptism, but he deals with the subject in a collateral way. A summary of what baptism signifies and its impact in the life of a believer can be read in an apology to Donato (Ferguson, 2014:415):

«[…] after the previous age’s infirmity had been swept away with the help of regenerative water, a light poured out from above on the purified and pure soul, after a second birth «navitas secunda», animated by that celestial spirit, rebuilt in me a new man […] in such a way that by now I began to be proper to the faith and not to sin anymore […]». Apology to Donato¹²⁹ (chap. 4) (My translation from Italian – LT).

¹²⁸ Quasten (2009²: 595-596): «Cyprian’s letters are an inexhaustible source for the study of one of the most interesting periods in the history of the Church. They reflect the problems and controversies in which the ecclesiastical administration debated in the middle of the third century. They refer to the hopes, fears, lives and deaths of Christians in one of the most important ecclesiastical provinces. The collection of these letters dates back to antiquity, and to Cyprian himself, who grouped some of them according to their content, to send copies to the various centers of the Christian world and to his brethren in the episcopate. Other collections were formed for building purposes. Modern editions have a total of eighty-one letters. Sixty-five come out of Cyprian’s pen, sixteen are addressed to him or the clergy of Carthage».

¹²⁹ Sometimes the apology to Donato is cited as Epistle n°1. Quasten (2009²:580): «Composed shortly after the author's baptism, which was probably celebrated on Easter night in 246. The treatise is not only intended to justify Cyprian's conversion but to invite readers to make the same gesture. Every sinner should regain courage by considering from which abyss Cyprian came from».
Another explanation of the effect of baptism can be found in his letter to Pompeo\(^{130}\) on the baptism of heretics, (Moreschini, 2007:283-291):

\(<5:1 […] those who are baptized […] are renewed and sanctified […]>. 5:2 […] After having freed himself of sins in baptism, he was sanctified and transformed into a new man in the spirit […]. 5:3 […] who can clothe the Christ having been baptized […] can receive all the more reason the Holy Spirit whom Christ has sent […]. 5:4 […] having in the Spirit the second birth by which we are born in Christ through the wash of regeneration […]. 6:1[…] in baptism, in fact the old man dies, and the new man is born […]. 6:2 […] she alone sanctified by Christ and she alone purified by the washing of water […]. 11:3 […] one cannot be saved except through the baptism of the one Church alone». Letter 74 (5:1-4; 6:1-2; 11:3) (My translation from Italian – LT).

The baptized person is renewed and sanctified (5:1), cleansed of sins and spiritually formed as a new person (5:2), thus clothed with Christ (5:3). She/he experiences regeneration and a second birth (5:4), the death of the old self so that the new may be born (6:1), purification from sins (6:2), salvation and identification with the church (11:3). Therefore, for Cyprian, baptism purifies and sanctifies.

In other writings he also speaks of forgiveness of sins (Moreschini, 2007:225-269):

\(<[…] in fact, with the sacrament of salvation the contamination of crimes is not washed in the way in which the stains of the skin and body are washed in a carnal bath and of this world. […] otherwise the human soul is cleansed of the merits of faith». Letter to 69 (12:2) (My translation from Italian – LT).

\(^{130}\) It is catalogued as Letter number 74.
«[…] the one who baptizes can grant another the remission of sins […]». Letter to 70 (1:3) (My translation from Italian – LT).

«7:1 […] the remission of sins, which is clearly given with baptism. In fact, the Lord […]. 18:2 […] be rewarded by Christ with the remission of sins and obtain the sanctification of baptism. 19:1 […] Christ […] forgives sins in baptism […]». Letter 73 (7:1; 18:2; 19:1) (My translation from Italian – LT).

The purifying, or purifying effect, of baptism is not like washing away the filth of the body, but through faith the corruption of sin is washed away, and the mind is purified (69, 12:1). In baptism, there is remission of sins (73, 7:1; 18:2), for Christ takes away sins (73, 19:1). Whoever administers baptism, gives the forgiveness of sins (70, 1:3).

The forgiveness of sins, however, is related to the action of the Holy Spirit. It is no coincidence that in his argument against baptism administered outside the one Church,131 Cyprian states that sins can only be forgiven to those who possess the Holy Spirit (Moreschini, 2007:223-285):

«1 In fact, from the moment that in baptism each one is forgiven of his sins, the Lord in his Gospel affirms and demonstrates that sins can only be forgiven by those who possess the Holy Spirit. 3 Therefore, in order to obtain, according to divine teaching and gospel truth, the remission of sins, to be sanctified and become temples of God, they must be baptized by the baptism of the Church […]». Letter 69 (11:1,3) (My translation from Italian – LT).

«[…] we are born in Christ through the wash of regeneration […]. Water alone cannot wash sins and sanctify man, if the baptizing one does not also have the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is necessary that those who recognize the

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131 His statement is famous: «Salus extra ecclesiam non est» that is «there is no salvation outside the Church». The subject will be examined in more detail in paragraph 4.4.2
baptism ministered by heretics must also admit that there is also the Spirit where they say there is baptism or that there is not even baptism where the Spirit is lacking, because there can be no baptism without Spirit». Letter 74 (5:4) (My translation from Italian – LT).

Only those who have been baptized by the baptism of the church, that is, where the Spirit is present (74, 5:4), are able to obtain the remission of sins and be sanctified and become temples of God (69, 11:1,3).

The necessity of baptism for salvation was a guiding force for Cyprian, not only in his defense of emergency baptism, but also in that of the baptism of children and baptism that were administered by heretics. In the next paragraphs we discuss each of these.

5.1.2 Baptism administered by heretics or schismatics

Around the middle of the third century a fierce dispute erupted between Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, and Stephen, bishop of Rome. The main theme was the validity (or not) of the baptism celebrated in the communities declared «heretical» or «schismatic».132 It is not entirely clear how the dispute arose, but its reason is very clear (Von Campenhausen 2005:214).

In Rome, Egypt and Palestine, it was common not to re-baptize heretics or schismatics who, having been baptized in heresy or schism, asked to enter in communion with the Church, and thus for the recognition of the validity of their baptism (Carpin, 2007:8). On the other hand, in Syria, Asia Minor and Africa, already since the Synod of

132 See note 124 for the distinction between «heretical» or «schismatic». 
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Carthage (225),\textsuperscript{133} the opposite practice was followed. That is, the applicants were renamed, or rather, baptized with the baptism of the Church, because the previous baptism received in heresy or schism was considered invalid. Cyprian, in one of his letters, reaffirms this practice (Moreschini, 2007:253):

«[…], from then until our days thousands of heretics in our provinces who have returned to the church, have not disdained or lingered to conform with this discipline, indeed they considered it reasonable and willingly embraced it, so as to obtain the grace of the bath of life and baptism that gives salvation […]». \textit{Letter 73 (3:1)} (My translation from Italian – LT).

The reason for the refusal to recognize the validity of the baptism of «schismatics» and «heretics» is very simple, and Cyprian illustrates it in many pages and with abundance of arguments (Moreschini, 2007:213-285):

«[…], The Church is one and only those who are in the Church can be baptized […]». \textit{Letter 69 (2:2)} (My translation from Italian – LT).

«[…], because being outside the Church I am not with the Holy Spirit, they cannot baptize whoever arrives, since only one is baptism, one is the Holy Spirit, and only one is the Church that was founded by the Lord on Peter to begin and signify unity». \textit{Letter 70 (3:1)} (My translation from Italian – LT).

«[…], outside the Church there is no salvation […]». \textit{Letter 73 (21:2)} (My translation from Italian – LT).

\textsuperscript{133} Laboa (2008:32): «The first bishop of Carthage whose known name is Agrippino, around 225 summoned a synod in order to decide on the penance that should be imposed on adulterers and the validity of the baptism of heretics. Seventy bishops responded to his call and concluded that those who had been baptized by heretics should be re-baptized. The reason why was that the baptism imparted by heretics, especially by the Novatians, was nothing more than a profane bath, since only the Church administered this sacrament in a valid manner. In Asia Minor various councils celebrated at that time, and especially that of Iconium (230-235), had come to the same conclusion, and the communities of Antioch and those of northern Syria also agreed». 

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«[...] In order for one to have God as a father, one must first have the Church as a mother [...]». \textsuperscript{134} \textbf{Letter 74 (7:2)} (My translation from Italian – LT).

The «heretical» or «schismatic» communities are not churches (69, 2:2), because the faith they profess, is not the true Christian faith (70, 3:1). This faith is deviated and cannot obtain the remission of sins. Therefore, the baptism of the «heretics» or «schismatic» is not a Christian baptism. When they return to the church, they must be baptized, since they never actually were baptized (73, 21:2; 74, 7:2) (Von Campenhausen 2005:216-18). The baptism received in their communities is null and void. What is administered and celebrated by the church is not a second baptism: it is the original valid baptism (Ricca, 2015:100).

This position, which was strongly opposed by Stephen, bishop of Rome from 254 to 257, is known to us through a letter sent to Cyprian. Owing to the parts reported verbatim by Cyprian himself, we can read the following (Moreschini, 2007:279):

«\textbf{1:2} [...] If anyone comes to you from any heresy, do not introduce innovations, but do only what has been handed down, imposing on them their hands in view of penance [...]. \textbf{2:1} has forbidden the baptism of those who come from any heresy [...] only they should be accepted [...]». \textbf{Letter 74 (1:2; 2:1)} (My translation from Italian – LT).

Concerning the theological reason for the recognition of the baptism administered by heretics and schismatics by Stephen, we read

\textsuperscript{134} It is known that Calvin is the only one among the reformers who speaks of the church as a mother and, like Cyprian, makes a connection among the maternity of the church and the fatherhood of God, but reverses the terms of relationship. Tourn (2009:1198): «[...] the Church is the mother of all those of whom He [God] is father [...]» Institution of the Christian religion Book IV, 1:1. That is, it is not the motherhood of the Church that leads to the fatherhood of God, but on the contrary it is the fatherhood of God that leads to the motherhood of the Church.
in a letter that Firmiliano, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, wrote to Cyprian (Moreschini, 2007:309):

«[…] but very helpful, he affirms, is the name of Christ to the faith and sanctification of the Church, so that whoever and wherever he is baptized in the name of Christ, immediately obtains the grace of Christ […]». Letter 75 (18:1) (My translation from Italian – LT).

Therefore, Stephen affirms that one should not baptize a person who has received baptism by heretics, regardless of their heresy (74, 1:2). This is the tradition of the church of Rome (74, 2:1). In every baptism, the majesty of name of Christ is present and it is sufficient to make it valid (75, 18:1).

According to Cyprian, what Stephen appeals to, is not the apostolic tradition, but a simple practice (Moreschini, II, 2007:287):

«The custom that little by little entered in some, cannot prevent the truth from prevailing and triumphing. In fact, the custom without truth is nothing more than an old mistake […]». Letter 74 (9:2) (My translation from Italian – LT).

Even mistakes can be traditional! On the question of baptism administered by heretics, the real tradition is the one guarded by the North African churches (and others), and not the one claimed by the church of Rome (Ricca, 2015:103).

### 5.1.3 Emergency baptism (for the sick ones)

Cyprian, contrary to the current use of the Church, in case of infirmity of the baptized, was not against a baptism by effusion

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135 See note num. 133.
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(perfusi). Many assumed an attitude of distrust towards this practice, both because they would have consented only in the case of danger of death, and because of reservations about a practice other than immersion (Ferguson, 2014:412).

A bishop named Magno, not known otherwise, had written to Cyprian about the validity of the baptism administered by the followers of Novatian and the baptism by sprinkling given to a sick man.

Novatian had been a priest in the church of Rome during the persecution of Decius. When Cornelius was appointed bishop (251 A.D.), three Italian bishops named him anti-bishop and later he became the protagonist of a schism. The baptism received from Novatian, having been done by infusion, was questioned by many and, probably because of his schism, it became the most famous emergency baptism of the ancient church.

Cyprian replied to Bishop Magnus and, because of the clarity of the arguments, three paragraphs that contained his answer are given below almost in their entirety (Moreschini, 2007:225):

137 Dattrino (2016:116): «On the matter of lapsi, Conelius, the new bishop of Rome, was inclined to grant them forgiveness. Novaziano refused it, to the point of accusing Cornelius of laxity, and from it a very violent schism was soon born».
138 Aiming to discredit the validity of the baptism of Novaziano, Cornelius, his rival, wrote a letter to Fabio, Bishop of Antioch, the text reached us thanks to Eusebius (Eusebius of Caesarea; II, 2005²:75-76): «14. […] He was helped by the exorcists when he fell into a serious illness and, believing himself close to death, precisely in the bed where he lay, he received his baptism by infusion, even if it is correct to say that such a man received it. 15. Nevertheless, after having escaped the illness, he did not receive all the other ceremonies to which one had to submit oneself according to the rules of the Church and he did not even receive the seal of the bishop. Not having received all this, how could he have received the Holy Spirit? 17. […] had been honored with the presbytery […] despite the opposition of all the clergy and also of a large number of lay people, since it was not allowed to those who, like him, had received baptism by infusion in his bed for an illness, to be promoted to any order of the clergy; but the bishop had asked that he be allowed to consecrate only him» Ecclesiastical History Book VI, 43:14-15, 17.
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«1. Dear brother, you also asked me what I think of those who obtain the grace of God in a state of sickness and suffering, if they are to be considered true Christians, since they are not washed [loti] with healthy water, but only wet [perfusi]. […] Each person should judge how he or she believes it is right and act accordingly. 2. Our opinion is this: the divine benefits cannot be diminished and weakened at all […]. Washing the stains of sin is something other than the washing of an ordinary bath. In the sacraments of salvation, when necessity is pressing, God gives His forgiveness to the believers, granting all the fast ways [compendia] of God. 3. Nor must anyone be disturbed by the fact that only the sick who obtain the grace of the Lord are sprinkled [asparigi] and wet [perfiundi] with water.... From here it is evident that sprinkling [asparsionem] with water also has the same effects as the saving wash [lavacri] and when these things happen within the church, where the faith of the one who receives and of the one who gives baptism is intact, everything has consistency and can be accomplished and completed thanks to the majesty of the Lord and the truth of the faith».

Letter 69 (12:1-3) (My translation from Italian – LT).

Cyprian is in favor of this practice of baptism in the event of serious illness. This is clearly a recent development, which did not have a consolidated tradition behind it, and therefore it was exposed to divergent points of view (Von Campenhausen 2005:218). The opponents of the baptism of the sick, that Cyprian addresses, explained their position with the fact that it was administered by infusing or sprinkling water instead of a full bath (69, 12:3).

Critics called those «[...] who obtain the grace of Christ through saved water and legitimate faith, not Christians, but clinicians [clinicos]».\(^\text{139}\) They believed that «those who have only been wasted

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[per fusively] saving water»¹⁴⁰ were «still empty and worthless»,¹⁴¹ so that if they recovered from the disease they would have to be baptized. To these Cyprian replies that the Spirit is not given with measure but pours into the believer in full.¹⁴²

This letter reveals the way in which Cyprian is very observant on the words he uses, in fact, the washer [loti] is distinct from sprinkling¹⁴³ [aspersionem] and infusion¹⁴⁴ [per fusii]. Since the procedure is different from the usual one, Cyprian insists that, outside this exception, everything else must be the same: it must be performed in the church, where the faith of the giver and the receiver is intact (not heretical) (73, 2-3).

In Cyprian’s thesis is also implicit the idea that if water produces purification, can it perhaps be determined by the quantity or timing of administration? Receiving baptism was considered so necessary for salvation that it was preferable to provide a replacement version rather than not impart it at all.

Emergency or deathbed baptisms became increasingly common, especially in the fourth century. The recognition of the effectiveness, in these cases, of sprinkling or infusion is the reason, it is to be expected, for the subsequent diffusion in the West of these substitutes for immersion even in different circumstances (Ferguson, 2014:414).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., Letter 69, 13:3.
¹⁴¹ Ibid.
¹⁴² Ibid., Letter 69, 14:1: «But the Holy Ghost is not given according to quantity. But all of it is infused upon the believer».
¹⁴³ Sprinkling generally means spreading a small amount of water, wetting or soaking.
¹⁴⁴ The effusion generally indicates to pour an abundant amount of water.
5.1.4 Baptism of children (infantium)

At the synod\textsuperscript{145} of Carthage of 253\textsuperscript{146} Cyprian and his sixty-six fellow bishops answered a question posed by Bishop Fido about the day on which to baptize an infant. Fido stated that the infant could not be baptized before the eighth day of birth, arguing that the law concerning circumcision should be adhered to.\textsuperscript{147} Therefore, Fido was obliged to wait at least eight days, taking as reference figure for the baptism, circumcision.\textsuperscript{148}

Cyprian and his fellow bishops responded unanimously to the matter by saying that baptism could be practiced immediately after birth (Moreschini, 2007:163-169):

\begin{quote}
«2:1 Then, as for the case of the children \textit{[infantium]}, in respect of whom you have said that it is not appropriate for them to be baptized on the second or third day of birth, and that the law of the ancient circumcision must be taken into account, so that you do not believe that a child \textit{[natus]} should be sanctified and baptized before the eighth day, our council has decided in a completely different way […]. 5.1 For this reason we believe that no one should be hindered in obtaining grace by virtue of that law that was once
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{145} At the time of the Empire, the Roman Africa was divided into several administrative districts, and the most known were the proconsular provinces of Numidia and Mauritania. At the end of the second century the Christian Church was sufficiently consolidated in North Africa. A regular hierarchy directed these communities with a bishop who enjoyed all the authority. The Church of Carthage dominated and exerted its influence on the others. Its bishop possessed a primacy of honor recognized by the other episcopates (Laboa, 2008:32). The fact that the Council’s practice soon became a regular institution is something really interesting. From the letters of Cyprian we know that, apart from periods of persecution, the bishops met at least once a year, in spring. And sometimes in fall. These large periodic assemblies helped to a great extent the preservation and uniformity of discipline. Such councils were also known outside Africa, and the reputation of Cyprian, who was the soul of seven of them, made them not only even more respectable but, above all, an instrument of unity between the churches (Ibid.).

\textsuperscript{146} According to Prof. Juan Maria Laboa, Professor Emeritus of Church History at the Pontifical University of Madrid, the synod was held in the autumn of 253 (Ibid. 34). Other sources place this Council in 252.

\textsuperscript{147} Circumcision was practiced on the eighth day. Authorized King James Version: «\textit{And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised}». Leviticus 12:3.

\textsuperscript{148} The authorization of a baptism before the eight days seems to indicate that the issue concerned an emergency baptism (Ferguson, 2014:429).
established, nor that spiritual circumcision should be impeded by carnal circumcision, but that all should absolutely be admitted to the grace of Christ [...] 5.2 [...] If even those who have committed the most serious crimes and those who have previously sinned against God, once they have been converted, are forgiven for their sins and no one is refused baptism and grace, all the more so they must not be refused to the child [infans] who, born recently, did not sin, except for the fact that, having been born in the flesh after Adam, he contracted at the time of birth the contagion of ancient death; but precisely for this reason he can more easily obtain the forgiveness of sins, since he is forgiven not of his own sins, but those of another. 6.1 Therefore, dear brother, in this council it was decided that no one should be deprived of the baptism and grace of God, who is merciful, benign and merciful to all, by us. 6.2 [...] We even more believe that this deliberation should be observed precisely with regard to children and infants, who are worthy of our help and of God’s mercy, because immediately when they come to light, crying and crying they do nothing but ask forgiveness [...]».


Cyprian’s letter to Fido, that informed him of the Synod’s decision, states that before God, a child and an adult are equal and that the divine gift is also equal (5:1-2; 6:2). Cyprian expressly refers to the sin of Adam, who brought the legacy of physical death to his descendants (5:2). However, it is still too early to speak of original sin (Ferguson, 2014:430):

«One must be careful to conclude too much about the doctrine of original sin from Cyprian’s reference to the sins (note the plural) of others».

The fact that baptism brings forgiveness of sins is at the heart of the argument (Klein, 2010:70). Baptism brings grace even to hardened sinners who have come to faith. Therefore, to a child who has not yet committed any sin, it will be even more easily applicable. (5:2).
Some scholars see in a famous Cyprian writing (*De lapsis*) a clear reference to the baptism of children (Klein, 2010:71-72). The mentioned passage is the following (Perutelli, 2010:312):

«[...] and so that nothing might be missing from the heap of crime, the children, moved or pushed by the hands of their parents, still lost small what they had conquered immediately after their birth. It is perhaps not true that when the day of judgment comes they will say: we have done nothing [...] has ruined the betrayal of others, we have had parricide parents: it is they who have denied us God as a father and the Church as a mother, so that we have been trapped by the fraud of others while small and unprovided, unaware of a fact like this, we have been added by others to the collective crime». *De lapsis* 9 (My translation from Italian – LT).

Without explicitly mentioning baptism, Cyprian seems to allude to it (Klein, 2010:72). He said that these children will be able to say in the judgment that their parents dragged them into idolatry.

Returning to Bishop Fido’s initial question, it did not call into question the baptism of children, but only the opportunity to administer it before the eighth day of life. It was a decision that has been approved by sixty-six bishops and it is an indication of a well-established and commonly accepted practice (Ferguson, 2014:431). After fifty years, the opposition to the baptism of children, to which Tertullian had given voice, is no longer heard in North Africa. The premise of the innocence of the child, no longer comes into question.

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149 Cyprian composed the treatise *De lapsis* after the persecution of Decius in the spring of 251. After thanking God for the restoration of peace, he praises the martyrs for their resistance and for being an example to their brothers. But joy immediately gave way to sorrow and consternation, since a great number of Christians have failed in persecution. Some sacrificed before they were even were forced to do so. Parents dragged their children to take part in these rites. Others, above all, blinded by the love of their goods, have fallen and have denied the faith (Quasten, 2009:582).
However, in Cyprian’s writings there is no data indicating the frequency and circumstances in which the baptism of children took place. It is easy to read Cyprian’s writings in the light of the later finding in which the practice of baptism of children is universally practiced and therefore to assume that we are talking about it. An in-depth study by Prof. Ferguson tends to modify this conclusion considerably, claiming that it was an emergency baptism (see footnote 105). The question will be further developed in the next chapter.

5.1.5 Conclusion

Cyprian was the first to have developed, under the impetus of historical events, a strongly ecclesiological sacramental theology. In Cyprian’s theological thought the Church is the fundamental reality of all Christian life. The central point of his ecclesiology is the unity of the Church, since it is the one body of Christ and the one bride of Christ (Letter 69, 11:1,3). Christ and the Holy Spirit are present only in the Church (Letter 70, 3:1).

Therefore, if someone wants to meet the salvation of Christ, he must meet it in the Church. If he wants to receive the Holy Spirit he must receive Him in the Church (Letter 70, 3:1). But Christ’s salvation is brought about through the sacraments administered by the Church, which thus becomes the only way of salvation (Carpin, 2011:105).

We know that there were four baptismal questions. The first three concerned the three divine persons, since the baptism is conferred in the name of the Trinity. The fourth baptismal question, on the other hand,

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150 Moreschini (2007:219,301): «[…] baptizes with our own baptismal symbol, recognizing the same God the Father, the same Christ the Son, the same Holy Spirit, and who can therefore claim the power to baptize because he does not differ from us in the questions that are asked at baptism […]»
highlights the relationship between the forgiveness of sins and life with holiness and the salvific mediation of the church (Carpin, 2011:38-39). In fact, four declarations of faith were enunciated: the remission of sins; eternal life; the holiness of the church; the salvific mediation of the church (Moreschini, 2007:219, 301):

«But even the questions that are asked during baptism are testimony to the truth. In fact, when we say: “do you believe in eternal life and in the remission of sins through the holy Church?”, we mean that the remission of sins can only be granted within the Church, […] where the Church is not there, sins cannot be forgiven». Letter 70, 2:1 (My translation from Italian – LT).

The Church is the holy instrument through which God sanctifies men, communicating to them the remission of sins and it introduces them into eternal life (Carpin, 2011:39-40). Only those who have been baptized with the baptism of the church, that is, where the Spirit is present (letter 74, 5:4), are able to obtain the remission of sins, to be sanctified and become temples of God (letter 69, 11:1,3).

According to Prof. Ricca (Ricca, 2015:102-103), whose interpretation I share, the crux of Cyprian’s position seems to be that he superimposes, so to speak, the church over Christ. So instead of saying that outside of Christ there is no salvation «extra Christum nulla salus», he says: outside the church there is no salvation «Salus extra ecclesiam non est» (Letter 73, 21:2).

At the beginning of the fourth century, regional synods and councils addressed the question of the baptism of children. The issue

Letter 69, 7:1. «[…] Whoever has been baptized can obtain grace if the Trinity has been invoked in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit [...]» Letter 75, 9:1.
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was thus taken from the hands of individuals and from mutual disputes and placed on representative theological platforms. As such, it represents a more advanced development in the thinking and practices of baptism in the early church. With that, baptism became a matter for the general church. With this development the current chapter concludes. In the following paragraphs, three general church meetings are discussed in this regard.

5.2 The Synod of Elvira (306/312)

In the first decade of the fourth century, a synod was held in the city of Elvira (a town in Andalusia near Granada), and all the bishops and priests of the Spanish provinces took part in it (Rinaldi, 2008:626). Deacons and the believers also participated, even if only the bishops exercised the power to legislate. The decisions established in Elvira influenced the development of the successive Councils of Arles, Sardica and Nicaea (Marocco, 1971:195).

From the report of the Council we are informed of the existence of 37 Christian communities, of the 19 bishops present, 11 of them were heads of Churches in present-day Andalusia, while of the 24 priests present, 14 of them represented a diocese of Betica (Laboa, 2008:44).

The Council’s acts include 81 canons, that is the highest number ever found in ancient Councils (Marocco, VI, 1971:196). Many of these canons concern disciplinary matters, others concern baptismal

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151 This synod set the foundation for what will be the future Church in Spain.
152 Osio of Cordoba is the most famous since he was counselor to the Emperor Constantine. He took part in the ecumenical councils of Nicaea and Sardica. Osio represents in other words a valid connection between the Church of the West and that of the East.
practices. The four most important canons in relation to baptism are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin Text&lt;sup&gt;153&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>English Text&lt;sup&gt;154&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tr>
<td>«Qui post fidem baptisti salutaris adulta aetate ed templum idoli idolaturus accesserit et fecerit, quod est crimen capitale, quia est summi sceleris, placuit nec in finem eum communionen accipere». Canone I.</td>
<td>«It is decided that anyone of a mature age, who, after the faith of saving baptism, approaches a temple as an idolater and commits this major crime, because it is an enormity of the height order, is not to receive communion even at the end». Canon I.</td>
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<tr>
<td>«Eos qui ab immundis spiritibus vexantur, si in fine mortis fuerint costituti, baptizari placet; si fideles fuerint, dandum esse communionem. Prohibendum etiam ne lucernas hi publice accendant; si facere contra interdictum voluerint, abstineantur a communione». Canone XXXVII.</td>
<td>«Those who are tormented by unclean spirits, if they have reached the point of death, shall be baptized; if they are already baptized, communion shall be given them. Furthermore, there people are forbidden to light candles publicly. If they want to act against the prohibition, they shall be kept away from communion». Canon XXXVII.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>«Eos qui ad primam fidem credulitatis accedunt, si bonae fuerint conversationis, intra biennium temporum placuit ad baptismi gratiam admitteri debere, nisi infirmitate compellente coegerit ratio velocius</td>
<td>«Those who arrive at the first stage of faith, if their reputation has been good, shall be admitted to the grace of baptism in two years, unless under the pressure of illness reason compels help more rapidly for the one approaching death or</td>
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subvenire periclitanti vel gratiam postulanti». Canone XLII. | at least the one begging for grace». Canon XLII.

«Qui aliquando fuerit catechumenus et per infinita tempora nunquam ad ecclesiam accesserit, si eum de clero quisque cognoverit esse Christianum, aut testes aliqui exstiterint fideles, placuit ei baptismum non negari, eo quod veterem hominem dereliquisse videatur». Canone XLV. | «As for one who was a catechumen and for a long time did not go to church at all, if one of the clergy acknowledged him to be a Christian, or if some of the believers come forward as witnesses, baptism shall not be denied him since he appears to have cast off the old man». Canon XLV.

The inflexibility of the declarations in these canons is striking. The Canon XLV certainly sums up the atmosphere of the time. The catechumens did not always disclose exemplary conduct and for those who have not attended the church for a long time, baptizing them would have been a problem. It was thus established that if a member of the clergy knew that a person was a Christian, the baptism of that person should not be denied if also one of the believers could bear witness to the person’s way of life, and moreover, if it was clear that she/he had abandoned the former lifestyle.

A detailed study of the 81 canons reveals that Christians were a minority in a mostly non-Christian world, and they lived immersed in all the pitfalls that could result from it. Official religious practices and dominant customs were a real temptation for many members of the community, as the prescriptions of the first three canons show. The synod intended to avoid mixed marriages of Christians with non-Christians, heretics and Jews, because of the potential danger that such

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71 The term was used for catechumens and indicated a believer not yet baptized (Ferguson, 2014:735).
155 «fideles», i.e. believer baptized (Ibid.).
156 It is about sacrifices to idols and sexual immorality.
marriages carry within themselves for the faith of believers (Marocco, 1971:196-197).

In conclusion, from the canons of the Synod of Elvira it can be deduced that heathenism remained strong and dominant in society, but, at the same time, the remarkable degree of affirmation of Christianity clearly emerges. This not only because of the abundant number of Churches present in the council, but also because they are described as veteran Churches, that is, well organized and developed, which leads one to suppose that they existed and that they had already developed for a long time (Laboa, 2008:47).

Therefore, it is not surprising that baptism was a very important practice that was the evidence of a real change in the lifestyle of the person. It is not by chance that the candidate for baptism (i.e. the Christian to use the term of the synod) was examined in depth and the testimonies of some believers were also indispensable.

5.3 Synod of Neo-Caesarea (314/325)

The Council of Neo-Caesarea (Concilium Neocesarense) is a local synod that was held in Neo-Caesarea del Ponto (now Niksar in Turkey) with the participation of 19 bishops presided over by Vitale of Antioch. Its date remains unspecified, in any case it took place after the Council of Ancira (314) and before the one of Nicaea (325).158

The fifteen canons promulgated can be traced back to two main themes: the penitential discipline connected to transgressions

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158 Probably it was held a few years after the Council of Ancira (314), because in the canons that have arrived up to us in Greek and Latin, there is no longer written about lapsi, so you have the impression that the persecution was now far away (Treccani, 1970:415).
concerning the conjugal and sexual sphere (Canons I-X) and the rules concerning the clergy in its three major orders, diaconate, priesthood and episcopate (Canons XI-XV) (Marocco, 1971:215).

Among the various decisions it was established that the minimum age for priestly ordination was thirty years (Canon XI). The marriage of priests was prohibited (Canon I) and the number of deacons was fixed at seven, even in large cities (Canon XIV). Two of these fifteen canons concern baptismal practice: 159

«Concerning a woman with child, it is determined that she ought to be baptized whenever she will; for in this the woman communicates nothing to the child, since the bringing forward to profession is evidently the individual privilege of every single person». Canon VI.

«If anyone be baptized when he is ill, forasmuch as his [profession of] faith was not voluntary, but of necessity [i.e. though fear of death] he cannot be promoted to the presbyterate, unless on account of his subsequent [display of] zeal and faith, and because of a lack of men». Canon XII.

To understand Canon six, it must be noted that, in that historical period of the Church, the catechumens, before being baptized, were examined in their faith, after which they were called to a public confession in which they declared that they would renounce the splendor of the world and expressed their desire to be baptized (Landon, 1909:394):

«Shortly before they were immersed, they declared in a loud voice that they wished to be baptized. Since these confessions could not be made by those who were still silent in their mother’s womb, the grace of baptism could not still reach them».

159 http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3803.htm
The Canon therefore states that if a pregnant woman received baptism, this was not passed on to the unborn child.

Canon twelve underlines how a baptism done for necessity, because of a serious illness, limited a future nomination as a presbyter. Some scholars believe that it was not uncommon to delay baptism as much as possible to avoid the obligations of life that would be derived from it (Ibid., pp.394-395):

«the reason for this prohibition was the well-known fact that at that time baptism was postponed as long as possible in order to be free from the restrictions imposed by baptism».

What draws attention to these canons are the quotations of emergency baptisms and the importance of the confession of faith by the baptizing (Marocco, 1971:217). It would seem that pedo-baptism was not practiced, given the importance of the confession of faith and that the latter was absolutely personal.

5.4 Council of Nicaea (325)

The Council of Nicaea, held in 325, was the first ecumenical Council of the Christian world. The Council was convened by Emperor

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To understand what is meant by ecumenical it is useful to trace the origin of the term *ecumenē*. At the basis of this word is the Greek verb *οἰκέω* (oikēō), i.e. living. In ancient Greek culture the term *ecumenē* indicated inhabited territories as opposed to uninhabited ones. With Hellenism the term assumed a political meaning: *ecumenē* was no longer in general the inhabited world, but the world of Hellenistic culture characterized by the organizational and political structures of the empire of Alexander the Great. With some ease in the Roman period, this made possible the identification between ecumenism and empire: if the ecumenism indicated the civilized world, it materialized in the Roman Empire. Ronchi (2007:26): «Initially the word ecumenism was used in this sense in the life of the church. Thus, the first Christian church councils, such as Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) or Chalcedon (451), were called ecumenical because they were believed to represent the entire universal church». 
Constantine, who intended to restore religious peace and achieve dogmatic unity that was undermined by various disputes, in particular Arianism. In fact, some differences about the nature of Christ in relation to the Father had arisen initially in the Church of Alexandria and then spread elsewhere. The difference entailed the nature of Christ in relation to the Father; whether He was «born» of the Father and thus have the same eternal nature as the Father or whether instead, as Arius taught, He had been «created» and thus he had a beginning over time.

The Council began on May 20, 325 with this premise. Given the geographical position of Nicaea, most of the participating bishops came from the eastern part of the Empire. Probably Osio, bishop of Cordoba and advisor to the emperor has been the one who presided over the Council sessions.

The emperor presided over the first session, during which he gave a solemn speech showing to all the bishops his surprise at seeing the peace of the Church upset. Then he asked them to examine the causes of discord and the resolution of the conflict (Laboa, 2008:53-54). The duration of the Council is not certain, perhaps it lasted from one to two months (Schatz, 2012:26). Although decisions were made on various subjects, 20 normative canons were in fact adopted. The importance of

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161 Constantine sent the bishops a letter in which he personally invited them to the meeting to be held in Nicaea, in the imperial summer palace, 80 kilometers from Constantinople, in the Asian part, and he put at their disposal the imperial means of travel (Laboa, 2008:52).

162 According to Arius there is only one principle, that is God, and it is from Him that everything comes by creation. Therefore, not only the world, but also the Son and the Holy Spirit are «creatures», even if in a superior and singular way. The Son is therefore not eternal like the Father, because «there was a time when he was not there» (Cattaneo, 2008:153). In this Council, to strongly oppose Arianism, a creed was drawn up, in which it is stated that the Son is «[...] generated, not created, of the same substance [in Greek, homoousios] as the Father [...]» (Sandri, 2014:43).

163 Tradition sets the number of participants to 318 (i.e. the same number of servants that Abraham armed according to the narrative of Genesis 14:14), in fact the number of participants just exceeded two hundred units (Schatz, 2012:26).
the Council of Nicaea is essentially linked to the formulation of a new «creed» (also known as Nicene symbol) established to impede the misleading Arian interpretation (Bolognesi, 2007:495).

Of the 20 canons that were written, two treat baptism:

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<tr>
<th>Latin Text¹⁶⁴</th>
<th>English Text¹⁶⁵</th>
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<tr>
<td>«Quoniam multa vel necessitate, aut aliter cogentibus hominibus, facta sunt praeter canonem ecclesiasticum, ita ut hominem e gentili vita nuper accedentes ad fidem, et exiguo tempore eruditi, statim ad spirituale lavacrum ducantur, et simul atque baptizati fuerint, ad episcopatum vel presbyterium promoveantur; recte habere visum est, ut nihil deinceps tale fiat. Nam et tempore opus est catechumeno, et post baptismum probatione majore: apertum enim est apostolicum scriptum, dicens: Non neophytum, ne forte inflatus in judicium incidat, et laqueum diaboli. Si vero procedente tempore aliquod animi peccatum inveniatur in ea persona, et duobus vel trubus testibus convincatur, abstineat talis a clero: qui autem praeter</td>
<td>«Since, either through necessity or through the importunate demands of certain individuals, there have been many breaches of the church’s canon, with the result that men who have recently come from a pagan life to the faith after a short catechumenate have been admitted at once to the spiritual washing, and at the same time as their baptism have been promoted to the episcopate or the presbyterate, it is agreed that it would be well for nothing of the kind to occur in the future. For a catechumen needs time and further probation after baptism, for the apostle’s words are clear: not a recent convert, or he may be puffed up and fall into the condemnation and the snare of the devil. But if with the passage of time</td>
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¹⁶⁴ https://earlychurchtexts.com/main/nicaea/canons_of_nicaea_01.shtml The quotations in Latin, given on this website, are taken from the monumental work of Migne, Jacques-Paul (1845), LXXXIV, Latin Patrology, Paris. This is a huge collection of writings of the Fathers of the Church and other ecclesiastical writers in Latin, produced between 1844 and 1855 by the French abbot Jacques-Paul Migne. It consists of a total of 221 volumes including indexes.

¹⁶⁵ http://www.allholyspirit.com/about-orthodoxy/canon/ecf37the_council_of_neocaesarea_histo-d5c.html
| Baptism in early Christianity:  
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|----|----|
| **haec facit, ut qui magnae synodi adversarius esse audeat, ipse de clericatu periclitabitur**.  
***Canone II.*** |
| some sin of sensuality is discovered with regard to the person and he is convicted by two or three witnesses, such a one will be suspended from the clergy. If anyone contravenes these regulations, he will be liable to forfeit his clerical status for acting in defiance of this great synod».  
***Canon II.*** |
| **«De Paulianistis, si ad Ecclesiam catholicam confugerint, definitum est eos omnino rebaptizari. Si qui vero praeterito tempore in clero fuerint, si quidem inculpati et irreprehensibles, rebaptizati ordinentur ab episcopo catholicae Ecclesiae. Si vero examinati, minus apti deprehensi fuerint, deponi eos convenit: similiter autem et de diaconissis, et omnino de his qui sub canone versantur, eadem forma servabitur. Diaconissarum autem meminimus, quae in habitu quidem esse censentur, quia vero nullam manus impositionem habent, ut omnino inter laicos ipsae deputentur».  
***Canone XIX.*** |
| «Concerning the former Paulinists who seek refuge in the catholic church, it is determined that they must be rebaptised unconditionally. Those who in the past have been enrolled among the clergy, if they appear to be blameless and irreproachable, are to be rebaptised and ordained by the bishop of the catholic church. But if on inquiry they are shown to be unsuitable, it is right that they should be deposed. Similarly, with regard to deaconesses and all in general whose names have been included in the roll, the same form shall be observed. We refer to deaconesses who have been granted this status, for they do not receive any imposition of hands, so that they are in all respects to be numbered among the laity».  
***Canon XIX.*** |

Canon II has the function of avoiding, as has already happened for various reasons, the rapid promotion of new converts to priests or bishops. To overcome this problem the canon states that more time is
needed for the preparation of the baptized and a longer trial period is necessary for the baptized.

When the Canon XIX speaks of the followers of Paul who intended to pass to the Catholic Church, it is referring to the followers of Paul of Samosata. It is therefore not surprising that the Council considered that, since they did not have the true faith in the three persons of the Trinity, the baptism they had received was not valid.

In conclusion, the Council was faced with certain issues and its main aim was to protect the unity of faith from heresies, especially the Arian theological disposition. However, there are some quotations in relation to baptism, from which it emerges that the Council attributed great importance to the period of formation of the baptized and to the correct faith in the three Persons of the Trinity.

5.5 Summary of baptism from Cyprian to the Council of Nicaea (325)

5.5.1 Cyprian

For Cyprian baptism purifies and sanctifies, in fact the remission of sins takes place in it (letter 73, 7:1; 18:2) since Christ takes away sins (letter 73, 19:1).

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166 Paul of Samosata (about 200 - about 275) was bishop of Antioch of Syria from 260 to 272 and an exponent of the adoptive doctrine. Several synods, probably three, were held against his ideas between 264 and 268. The third synod of Antioch (268) condemned him and deposed him from the office of bishop. According to Paul, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were one «prosopon», but the Son and the Holy Spirit, being respectively the Word (Logos) and the Wisdom «Sophia», were without hypostasis (state): in practice, the only person was the Father, while the other figures were attributes or impersonal appellations of the Father.
Only those (including children) who have been baptized by the baptism of the church, that is, where the Spirit is present (letter 74, 5:4), are able to obtain the remission of sins, to be sanctified and to become temples of God (letter 69, 11:1,3). For Cyprian, the church is one and his statement is famous: «Salus extra ecclesiam non est» that is «there is no salvation outside the Church» (Letter 73, 21:2).

At the Synod of Carthage of 253 Cyprian and his sixty-six fellow bishops answered a question of Bishop Fido about the day on which they could baptize a newborn baby. The question did not query the baptism of children but only the opportunity to administer it before the eighth day of life. The council’s decision holds that before God a child and an adult are equal and that the divine gift is also equal (letter 64, 5:1-2; 6:2). Cyprian expressly refers to the sin of Adam, who brought to his descendants the inheritance of physical death (letter 64, 5:2). However, it is still too early to speak of original sin (Ferguson, II, 2014:430).

**5.5.2 Synod of Elvira**

The Council’s acts include 81 canons, the highest number ever found in ancient Councils (Marocco, VI, 1971:196).

Many of these canons concern disciplinary matters, others reflected baptismal practices. The firmness of the declarations in these canons is striking. The Canon XLV certainly sums up well the atmosphere of the time.

Baptism was a very important practice that had to testify to a real change in the lifestyle of the person. It is not by chance that the candidate for baptism (i.e. the Christian to use the term of the synod)
was examined in depth and the good testimonies of some believers were also indispensable.

5.5.3 Synod of Neo-Caesarea

About twenty bishops took part in the Council and drew up fifteen canons. Two of these concerned baptismal practice. The quotations of emergency baptisms and the importance of the confession of faith by the baptizing make these canons interesting (Marocco, VII, 1971:217). It seems that practice of pedo-baptism was not practiced, given the importance of the confession of faith and that the latter was personal (as in the case of a pregnant woman).

5.5.4 Council of Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea, convened in 325, was the first ecumenical council of the Christian world. Although decisions were made on various issues, 20 normative canons were in fact written, the importance of the Council of Nicaea is essentially linked to the formulation of a new «creed» (also known as Nicene symbol) formulated and accepted to impede the misleading Arian interpretation.

Among the twenty canons that were written, two refer to baptism. The Council gives great importance to the period of formation of the baptized and to the correct faith in the three Persons of the Trinity. It is interesting to note that issues of baptismal controversy are no longer in the hands of individuals but have even become a theological issue on the agenda of an Ecumenical Council.
5.6 Conclusion

In final analysis we conclude that in the third century people were baptized with the Trinitarian formula, by total or partial immersion (in case of emergency).

Pedo-baptism was practiced, although it is theologically and anthropologically not yet motivated in terms of original sin, as was argued by Augustine (Ferguson, II, 2014:430). In comparison to earlier arguments, it now became common opinion that those who administered baptism, granted the forgiveness of sins, even though the forgiveness of sins was however related to the action of the Holy Spirit. The rapid increase in the number of Christians meant that the administration of the sacrament was increasingly delegated by the bishop to priests (Kelly, 1999²:255).

The challenge of renunciation during persecution as well as the church historical problem of the various schisms posed the question of the validity and integrity of baptism and as a consequence, the dilemma of the repetition of baptism. This led to giving ever more importance to the true church. Regarding this, the famous phrase of Cyprian states «Salus extra ecclesiam non est» that is «there is no salvation outside the Church» (Letter 73, 21:2).

At the beginning of the fourth century, synods and regional councils addressed the issue of the baptism of children. The issue was then taken up by individuals and mutual disputes and placed on representative theological platforms. This led to a more advanced development in baptismal thought and practice than in the early Church. Cyprian can be seen as a transition figure. He represents the ecclesiological disclosure and understanding or assertion of the
sacrament of baptism on the one hand, and the dealing of baptism in synods and councils on the other hand. With that, baptism became a matter for the general church.

It is of significance to note that matters of controversies related to baptism have become a theological issue on the agenda of an Ecumenical Council. It is no coincidence that in the famous creed formulated in the Council of Nicaea there is a reference to baptism.

Our analysis of Christian writings ends with the decisions between 250 and 325. It indicated that opposition to pedo-baptism no longer exist. What was introduced in the trajectory of Christian thinking at the time of Tertullian, was now a well-established practice.

In the ultimate chapter following the final conclusions of this research will be argued.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

In the three previous chapters we have seen how the practice and theology of baptism has evolved over time, that is, from the New Testament apostolic teaching to the renowned canons of the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. At the end of each chapter, a paragraph has been dedicated to the synthesis of what has been analyzed, highlighting the most significant points of convergence.

We are now in a position to delineate the platform of theological and ecclesiological thinking on infant baptism, as it was established and developed in the early church until the Council of Nicaea. The command to baptize does not go back to the historical Jesus, but has its origin in the risen Christ Jesus. In Matthew’s Gospel, unlike other passages in Scripture, the baptismal formula is Trinitarian. This formula became the received and recognized formula in the church and its baptismal theology. Its authority was attributed to the risen Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The New Testament clearly shows that the Christian community has practiced baptism from the beginning. Those who converted to the new faith, were welcomed into the community through baptism (Barth, 1987:13).

In the New Testament a broad and satisfactory description of the baptismal rites of the first Christian communities is absent. This absence is presumably justified by the fact that those rites were so commonly used that it was not necessary to describe them in detail. Comparing the data and information, it was possible to reconstruct the practice of baptism in the apostolic era, as it was explicated in chapter
two. The practice of baptism involved the use of water. Immersion is either implicit or in accordance with what is said. A baptized administered the Christian baptism. It is a unique event and it is imparted in the name of Jesus Christ, and characteristically included the profession of faith in Him.

Our analysis established that the New Testament passages reveal the presence of a structure or order when dealing with baptism. This became apparent in applicable texts as well as in the main baptismal accounts of the book Acts.168 This structure or baptismal order is constituted, our research pointed out, by a series of three elements: preaching, faith and the celebration of baptism.

It is at this point worth the while to be reminded of Caspani’s excellent summary in this regard (Caspani, 2016:14-15):

«The fundamental content of the preaching is the proclamation of the kerygma (that is, the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ), accompanied by a pressing call to conversion. Preaching corresponds in a special way to faith, which implies both the acceptance of Kerygma, with the adhesion to Christ the Lord, and the conversion consequent to such adhesion. Based on this faith, the ritual of baptism takes place. The New Testament allows us to describe it as an immersion in running water (of a river or of a tub), preceded or accompanied by a solemn profession of faith, perhaps in the form of dialogue between the one who baptizes and the one who is baptized. At first glance, a structure of this kind seems to be intended for adult subjects since they are able to personally accept the preaching and adhere to it before receiving baptism. Therefore the fact that the baptismal celebration may also concern infants, that is, those

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167 Mk. 16:15 (see paragraph 2.1.2); Acts. 2:38 (see paragraph 2.2.1); Eph. 1:13.
168 Acts. 8:35 the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip (see paragraph 2.2.3); Acts. 10:34-48 the baptism of Cornelius by Peter (see paragraph 2.2.5); Acts. 16:25-34 the baptism of the jailer by Paul and Silas (see paragraph 2.2.7); Acts. 18:5-8 the baptism of Crispus and the first Corinthians (see paragraph 2.2.8).
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who are not yet able to perform an act of their personal faith, would seem to be a difficult hypothesis to sustain».

In the book of Acts, conversion precedes baptism. Later, as the Christian proclamation and the terminology spreads, the term «faith» were used more often instead of «conversion» (Barth, 1987:49). All conversion stories concerned adult people.¹⁶⁹ There are no sure indications that these included infants or children (Ferguson, 2014:17,218,231,¹⁷⁰ Ferrario, 2008:111-112, Rinaldi, 2008:774¹⁷¹ and Toppi, 1999³:39-41).

Our thorough analysis of the various cases of baptism reported in the New Testament, indicated that these consequently were linked to adults. In fact, there is no reference to pedo-baptism. On the contrary, it became clear that baptism was always preceded by the preaching of the Gospel. It, in turn, we saw, called to faith in Jesus and to repentance. Only adults could respond to this demand. As indicated, the passages on the baptism of an entire family (a subject dealt with in paragraph 2.2.5.1), excluded children. In final analysis our research concerning the New Testament texts on baptism, as argued in chapter two, found a meaningful summary in Mk. 16:16: «He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned».

¹⁶⁹ For the subject of baptizing an entire house or family, where some believe that possible children were also involved, see the observations in section 2.2.5.1.
¹⁷⁰ «In the New Testament, baptism is the baptism of adults, that is initiatory and unrepeatable. It introduces into the eschatological community of salvation. [...] In the first two centuries baptismal ceremonies combined the action of God, the freedom of the candidate and the participation of the community; but in the Middle Ages, with the practice of the baptism of children, the free choice of the candidate was silenced, and the community elements disappeared or were reinterpreted, so that ritualism engulfed these two aspects».
¹⁷¹ «In the fourth century, the mass conversion of entire populations and the open favor that the profession of the Christian faith met in the imperial courts favored profound transformations, especially with regard to the celebration of baptism. In the apostolic age, the rite was the external witness of the conversion to the faith in Jesus, of the new birth in a completely different and renewed existence; therefore, it intended to manifest an individual and conscious choice and commitment […]».
Chapter three focused on the second century and identified a number of writings by the so-called Apostolic Fathers. These reflected the context of the early Christian generations. They are of special interest because they were composed when the New Testament was still in formation and did not yet appear as a well-defined corpus (dell’Osso, 2011:6). In some of these writings, our investigation we found significant references to baptism, and as a consequence demarcated them.

The analysis of the texts indicated that during in the second century Christians were baptized by total or partial immersion,\footnote{The baptism according to the Didaché can also be done by pouring three times water on the head, if you cannot practice by immersion. Note that in the baptisms told by the New Testament there is no trace of this practice (Didaché 7:3) (Ferguson, 2014:236).} in terms of the Trinitarian formula. It also became clear that baptism and the Eucharist were strictly linked.\footnote{See the Didaché (9:5), Justin the Martyr (1st Apology 65:1-2,5); Hippolytus of Rome (Apostolic Tradition chapter 16).} The newly baptized entered the Christian community and with the participation in the Eucharist, she/he seals her/his belonging to the Church of the Lord within the new community (Gandolfo, 2004:36).

Baptism was thus meant for those who had willingly adhered to the Christian teaching, who had placed their trust in it and who had promised to live a Christian life. They were adults who had been adequately prepared by a substantiated baptismal catechesis (Ricca, 2015:81, Von Campenhausen, 2005:21). The consulted authors also put great emphasis on the voluntary acceptance of baptism and the exercise of free will by the candidate (Ferguson, 2014:273). There was never any talk of pedo-baptism. However, some scholars see in a passage of Irenaeus a reference to pedo-baptism (Arduini, 2010:66). With
precaution, we have considered this passage to be ambiguous because neither of the two arguments (against or pro pedo-baptism) seems to have enough argumentative weight to prevail over the other.

During the third century, the church spread quite homogeneously in almost all the provinces of the Mediterranean Roman Empire. The in-depth consideration of references to baptism in Christian writings (chapter four) indicated that in the third century people were baptized with the Trinitarian formula and by total or partial immersion (in case of infirmity/emergence). They were adults who had been adequately prepared by baptismal catechesis. Pedo-baptism, however, was practiced as well, even if it was still too early to link this practice to the theology of original sin (Ferguson, II, 2014:430).

In comparison with the previous generation of Christian scholars, we had to conclude, after analysis of the applicable parts of the works of three leading theologians at the beginning of the third century, Tertullian, Hippolytus of Rome and Origen, that differentiated views and the incorporation of children in the rites of baptism, surfaced in Christian writings.

174 Cyprian, contrary to the current use of the Church, in case of infirmity of the baptized, was not against a baptism by effusion (perfusi). Many assumed an attitude of distrust toward this practice, both because they would have consented only in case of danger of death, and because of reservations about a practice other than immersion (Ferguson, 2014:412). For example, the baptism received by Novaziano, having been done by infusion, was questioned by many and, probably because of his schism, became the most famous emergency baptism of the ancient church.

175 Tertullian was the first theologian to speak in explicit but critical terms about the baptism of children. He dissuaded to do it and recommends that it be deferred until the time when the baptized person is aware of his/her faith (De Baptismo 18:4-5). Ultimately, Tertullian does not dispute the value of children's baptism by itself, but rather its pastoral opportunity. He demands that such an important act such as baptism, to be preceded by adequate preparation (Carpin, 2011:106). We can therefore deduce that this type of baptism was already being administered in his time; moreover, if he raised the problem it can be assumed that the phenomenon had reached considerable proportions already during his lifetime.
Tertullian was the first Christian author to unequivocally mention the baptism of children. He does so in his work written around 198-200 A.D. entitled *De Baptismo*. For him, we have seen, baptism is the heart of the Christian experience. It is an action of God that erases sins and confers the Spirit (4:4; 7:1; 8:1-3). He also considered baptism as the «sacrament of faith» (1:1). As indicated in chapter four, this constituted a new element in baptismal thinking. According to him this sacrament is both an oath and a consecration to God.

At the time, baptism of children was practiced in churches, but Tertullian advises against it and recommends that it be delayed until the time that the baptized would be in a position to confess her/his faith (18:4-5). Ultimately, Tertullian does not contest the value of the baptism of children. He rather is led by a pastoral concern. The radical life changing act of faith should be preceded by adequate preparation.

Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition* (215 A.D.), certainly widely used in Carthage, Alexandria of Egypt, Syria and Palestine, reflected the practice of a well-defined church such as that of Rome. It represented, thus we have established, the most explicit and complete testimony relating to Christian initiation in the third century (Caspani, 2016:20). The catechumenate is an obligatory platform for baptism (chap. 17), the latter takes place by immersion (chap. 18) and with the Trinitarian formula (chap. 18). Baptism concerns all believers and their children, including newborns (chap. 18).

Origen also reflected on baptism. According to his thought, there is an association between baptism and forgiveness of sins (Klein, 2010:58-59). Repentance is the prerequisite for receiving baptism, which must take place according to the Trinitarian formula. He calls it
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«baptism of salvation» and through it, one has access to the church that represents Paradise.

In our analysis we have established a significant development regarding the baptism of children. While for Hippolytus, baptism also concerns the children of believers, according to the theology of Origen instead, baptism assumes a less restrictive function. There is no longer any distinction between children of believers and non-believers. Baptism is indispensable even for newborns who have only one day of life, the question is now another: « […] No man is free from stain, even if his life on earth lasted only one day […]» (Homily on Luke 2:22).

Origen explains in his commentary on the letter to the Romans that as Jesus needed purification, recounted in Luke 2:22, because of the stain implicit in having taken on a human body, the same applies to all human beings (Comment. on the Romans 6:5-6). All men are born with this stain, which is why in the theology of Origen baptism plays an indispensable role even for newborns. However, it is still too early to talk about hereditary sin that will instead find a more robust theological argumentation with Augustine of Hippo (Ferrario, 2008:112-113).

We have concluded that at the beginning of the third century, different emphases and views on baptism emerged in Christian thinking. Children of Christians were provisionally incorporated in these trajectories of thinking. The line in which our argument has been guided by the sources commenced with theological reflection on baptism during the second century. Infant baptism does not appear in these considerations. A subsequent development (during the first half of the third century) indicated differentiation and the accommodation
of children in baptism. Baptism also received at this time ecclesiological and theological significance as a sacrament. Cyprian can be seen as a transition figure. He represents the ecclesiological disclosure and understanding or assertion of the sacrament of baptism on the one hand, and the dealing of baptism in synods and councils on the other hand.

Cyprian was the first to have developed, under the impetus of historical events, a strongly ecclesiological sacramental theology. In Cyprian’s theological thought the Church is the fundamental reality of all Christian life. The central point of his ecclesiology is the unity of the Church, since it is the one body of Christ and the one bride of Christ (Letter 69, 11:1,3). Christ and the Holy Spirit are present only in the Church (Letter 70, 3:1).

Therefore, if someone wants to meet the salvation of Christ, she/he must meet it in the Church. If she/he wants to receive the Holy Spirit she/he must receive Him in the Church (Letter 70, 3:1). But Christ’s salvation is brought about through the sacraments administered by the Church, which thus becomes the only way of salvation (Carpin, 2011:105). There were four baptismal questions. The first three concerned the three divine persons, since the baptism is conferred in the name of the Trinity. The fourth baptismal question, on the other hand, highlights the relationship between the forgiveness of sins and life with holiness and the salvific mediation of the church (Carpin, 2011:38-39). In fact, four declarations of faith were enunciated: the remission of sins;

176 Moreschini (2007:219,301): «[…] baptizes with our own baptismal symbol, recognizing the same God the Father, the same Christ the Son, the same Holy Spirit, and who can therefore claim the power to baptize because he does not differ from us in the questions that are asked at baptism [...]» Letter 69, 7:1. «[…] Whoever has been baptized can obtain grace if the Trinity has been invoked in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit [...]» Letter 75, 9:1.
eternal life; the holiness of the church; the salvific mediation of the church (Moreschini, 2007:219, 301).

The Church is the holy instrument through which God sanctifies man, communicating the remission of sins and the introduction into eternal life (Carpin, 2011:39-40). Only those (including children) who have been baptized with the baptism of the church, that is, where the Spirit is present (letter 74, 5:4), are able to obtain the remission of sins, to be sanctified and become temples of God (letter 69, 11:1,3).

At the beginning of the fourth century, regional synods and councils addressed the question of the baptism of children. The issue was thus taken from the hands of individuals and from mutual disputes and placed on representative theological platforms. As such, it represents a more advanced development in the thinking and practices of baptism in the early church. Baptism became a matter for the general church.

According to the Synod of Alvira baptism was a very important practice that had to testify to a real change in the lifestyle of the person. It is not by chance that the candidate for baptism (i.e. the Christian to use the term of the synod) was examined in depth and the good testimonies of some believers were also indispensable. At the Synod of Neo-Caesarea the importance of the personal confession of faith was emphasized. It seemed as if pedo-baptism was not practiced. The Council of Nicaea gave great importance to the period of formation of the baptized and to the correct faith in the three Persons of the Trinity. It is of significance to note that matters of controversies related to baptism have become a theological issue on the agenda of an
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ecumenical Council. It is no coincidence that in the famous creed formulated in the Council of Nicaea there is a reference to baptism.

Our study of primary sources dating from the early church has thus clearly determined that infant baptism initially did not occur and was not practiced in the Christian Church. Pedo-baptism surfaced in the church’s history for the first time at the beginning of the third century. Until the Council of Nicaea (325) some theologians accepted infant baptism, but it went hand in hand with an underpinning theological understanding of what baptism indicated and signified. Why did this shift in the church’s theology and ministry occur? Two possibilities are argued in the subsequent part of this chapter

As we have seen, pedo-baptism began to be practiced from the second half of the second century, but it did not become a commonly accepted practice before the fifth century (Ferrario, 2008:112). It may have been the answer to several pressures. It is possible that the «parallel with the Jewish rite of circumcision»177 led Christians to establish an equivalent «rite of passage» for Christian children (McGrath, 1999:516).

More generally, it seems that there has been a pastoral need for Christian parents to celebrate the birth of a child within the domestic community of faith (Cova, 2014:101-102). The baptism of children

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177 The theologian Oscar Cullmann, for example, in his book Baptism in the New Testament speaks about «a fundamental analogy between circumcision and Christian baptism» and «of the analogy between circumcision of newborns and Christian baptism of newborns» (Cullman, 1950:56-57,65). Wishing to simplify this theological position, which is shared by several Christian churches, we could say that if under the Old Covenant male infants were circumcised, the same should apply to male infants under the New Covenant. Both circumcision and baptism, in fact, are signs and seals of God's Covenant of Grace, which includes not only adults but also children. Indeed, baptism, which is an equivalent of the circumcision of the Old Testament, is even more global because it includes both males and females (Rodman, 2009:287).
may have had its origin in part as a response to this need. The idea that
the sacrament forgives not only the sins committed before conversion,
but also original sin, was progressively inserted into baptismal doctrine.
That is: if baptism frees from original sin, which in turn excludes
communion with God, it becomes imperative to participate in the rite
of baptism (Ferrario, 2008:113).

What would have happened to those who would have died without
being baptized? For Augustine these could not be saved, and he strongly
argued that unbaptized children were condemned to eternal damnation
(McGrath, 1999:517). However, he admitted that these children would
not face such an unpleasant situation as those who had lived to
adulthood and committed real sins (Cova, 2014:105-106).

The questioning of original sin therefore received a settlement
made due to Augustine. It is not a coincidence that the definitive
triump of the pedo-baptist praxis coincided in principle with such
developments (Ferrario, 2008:112-113):

«Augustinian influence is also decisive concerning the affirmation of the
validity of baptism regardless of doctrinal orthodoxy or of the ethical quality
of those who receive it or of those who celebrate it. Therefore, it is not an
exaggeration to say that the doctrine and the practice of the ancient church in
the first part of the fifth century assume the characteristics that will follow it
in the subsequent centuries and that are further consolidated by the imposition
of the regime of Christianity. Therefore, that is of the coexistence between
the civil community and the ecclesial community: the famous mass baptisms,
by imperial will, adequately symbolize this situation».

However, it must be underlined that Augustine did not argue ex
novo, but rather, he endeavored to justify a fact, that is, to explain the
reason why the church also baptized children. Therefore, it can be considered that the argument of original sin was functional to the generalized spread of the practice of pedo-baptism, also because of the high infant mortality of the time, but not to its creation (Cova, 2014:111-117). The basic motivation was developed positively: it did not aim at depriving children of the great graces from baptism (Ibid., pp.121-122).

Professor Everett Ferguson supports a theory that pedo-baptism began for reasons of emergency. It began with cases of children whose illness constituted a danger of death. When a child whose parents were Christian fell seriously ill, it was natural that they cared for her/his soul and therefore they wanted to prepare everything for her/his life in the afterlife. It would have been difficult to refuse the request of parents or family members to baptize a seriously ill child.

After years of study and after analyzing various sepulchral inscriptions referring to children or infants, from the end of the second century until the fourth, Professor Ferguson came to this conclusion (Ferguson, II, 2014:435):

«Reading the inscriptions concerning baptism, some impressions arise: 1. there was no age at which baptism was commonly administered; 2. there is no evidence that children were habitually baptized shortly after birth, and in fact the data show the opposite; 3. the correlation between the time of baptism and the time of death, where they can be determined on the basis of the inscriptions, shows the prevalence of emergency baptism; then on the basis of the epigraphic data available this practice and demonstrable only for children».

178 In note n° 104, we anticipated this subject, speaking of the emergency baptisms «etiam periculo ingeri» to which Tertullian referred.
I have chosen four among the numerous sepulchral quotations to support his view:

**Catacomb of Callisto (Rome) year 268 A.D. (Ferguson, 2014:431):**

«[…] Marciano lived twelve years, two months and … days. He received grace on September 20 […] he gave his soul to God on September 21 […]. May you live among the saints forever».

**Catacomb of Priscilla (Rome) third century inscriptions (Ferguson, 2014:432-433):**

«Irene lived with her parents for eleven months and six days and received the grace on April 7 and gave her soul to God on April 13».

«Approniano, lived one year, nine months and five days. He was tenderly loved by his grandmother and when she saw that he was about to die she prayed to the church that he could leave the world as a believer».

«This is what his parents built for Julia, their beloved child, so innocent that she was made a believer. […] She lived eighteen months and twenty-two days and she was made a believer at the eighth hour of the night, almost exalting her last breath. He survived another four hours […] He died in the early hours of the day of September 25, 314».

According to Prof. Fergusson, even in ancient times, the acceptance of the baptism of children for reasons of emergency would also explain the absence of a debate in the church of origin about the admissible age for baptism (Ferguson, II, 2014:4381).

I would now like to propose an interesting hypothesis according to which the Antonine Plague (165-180 A.D.) has been a catalyst for emergency baptisms. It raged in the Roman Empire causing about 5,000,000 deaths, up to 2,000 deaths a day in Rome alone (LO Cascio,
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2012:89). Is it possible that this plague affected the theology of baptism to such an extent that several emergency baptisms began to be practiced?\(^\text{179}\) The link between pedo-baptism and the Antonine Plague however is presented only on a hypothetical level, since no literary source explicitly expresses this link.

The Antonine Plague (165-180 A.D.) is also known as the Plague of Galen, since it was the name of the one who described the Plague. It has been an ancient pandemic of smallpox or measles that struck the Roman Empire. The plague may have been brought back to Rome by the troops returning from military campaigns against the Parties. The plague also caused the death of the Roman emperor Lucius Verus (169 A.D.) and co-ruler with Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus from whom the plague took its name.

Historical sources inform us that a second outbreak of the plague, accompanied by a severe famine, occurred from 189 A.D. We do not have precise information on the duration of the second phase. It seems that it did not go beyond the reign of Lucius Aurelius Commodus and therefore it ended in two years. In total, the plague lasted about a quarter of a century with an interval of about ten years in which, however, there were several famines. A number of historians believe that eventually about a third of the population of the empire died and, in some areas, almost all of the Roman army has been decimated (Lo Cascio, 2012:90).

Going back to the first chapters of our research we have seen how throughout the sub-apostolic period, we have not found any explicit reference to the baptism of children. On the contrary, every time they

\(^\text{179}\) Dr. Francesco Arduini in his book "The Baptism of Children. A hypothesis on the origins" believes that an original and daring hypothesis of this kind is plausible (Arduini, 2010:83-87).
have dealt with the subject, the tendency seemed to be directed towards adult baptism, while infants seem to have been considered “pure” regardless of being baptized. The apologists, who followed the sub-apostolic authors, reinforced this trend. For example, Justin Martyr, undoubtedly contradicts the natural birth that took place by the will of others (of the parents), with the birth in Christ, that is, baptism, which must take place in full awareness. Thus, arriving at the period in which Irenaeus lived, we have noticed how in his work, Against Heresies, he mentioned the baptism of children. It is here that we find the first historical documentation of the fact, although some consider it ambiguous. Then, in the third century, when the last resistance of Tertullian gave in, Hippolytus described the practice of pedo-baptism in such a way as to make us believe that it was accepted without reservation by the Christian world of the time.

Is it possible that, close to period in which Irenaeus lived, there were discussions in progress? And were already some churches practicing the baptism of infants? The documents do not give us any disclosure on the matter, but however it cannot be totally excluded. The diagram below shows how the sources we analyzed begin to cite pedo-baptism next to the period of the Antonine Plague:
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>TESTIMONY ON PEDO-BAPTISM</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical period (0-325 A.D.)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 - 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Testament</td>
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<td>Didaché</td>
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<tr>
<td>Epistle of Barnabas</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Shepherd of Hermas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Justin Martyr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irenaeus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tertullian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hippolytus of Rome</td>
<td>Present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Origen</td>
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<td>Cyprian</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The hypothesis that the Antonine Plague may have acted as a catalyst for the acceptance of Pedo-baptism would also be coherent with the theory of Professor Everett Ferguson that states that it all began for reasons of emergency. Who knows, in the future, that evidence will be discovered that could support all this, and that what is at the moment stated just on a hypothetical level (given that no literary source explicitly expresses this link), should be reviewed and corrected.

Once we have a general picture of on what historical documents say, and do not say about the subject of baptism, it is likely to expect an answer to some questions, such as:

- Is pedo-baptism legitimate according to the teaching of the Apostolic Fathers and apologists?
- Is it effective?
• Is it null?

The questions could still be many, but at this point the assignment of my research reaches its conclusion. Several hypotheses have been raised to explain the origin of pedo-baptism. We discussed the subject of the baptism of an entire house, the parallel with the Jewish rite of circumcision, the connection with the doctrine of original sin consolidated by Augustine, and finally, the hypothesis of the emergency baptisms. At the end of this work we can say that there are no proved clues that enables us to affirm with certainty that pedo-baptism was the norm or in any case, that it was in use from the beginning of the life of the church. I personally share the position of Tertullian and the interesting hypothesis of Prof. Everett Ferguson.

In final conclusion, baptism is an order established by the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16). It is a sign of fellowship with Christ in his death and resurrection. In baptism one bears witness to having been grafted onto Christ (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27) and having received Christ's remission of sins (Mk. 1:4; Acts 22:16) (Bolognese, 2007:78-79). Baptism also speaks of surrendering oneself to God through Jesus Christ and to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:2-4). Baptism is therefore an act of witness, faith, commitment and obedience.

The individual is baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19-20). In Mk. 16:16 a meaningful sentence is summarized: «He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned». Baptism is an order of the risen Lord (Mt. 28:19) but the matter that divides the world Christian community into two, between the pedo-baptist and non-baptist
churches (Ricca, 2015:9) is not much the submission to this order, as the moment in which to minister it.
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