Theology of Baptism
Reflected in
The Design of the Baptismal Font

Jean Iacino
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Baptism

• from the Greek baptizein, which means to plunge or immerse
Roots of Baptism in Scripture and Tradition

• From the beginning, Baptism was linked to a profession of faith
  – Belief and water went together.
  – On the first Pentecost Sunday, 3,000 people who heard the preaching of Peter were baptized (Acts 2:41).
Roots of Baptism in Scripture and Tradition

• By the second century, a verse was inserted into the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch; just before Philip baptizes him, this version of the story has the eunuch say, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37)
Roots of Baptism in Scripture and Tradition

• At the turn of the third century, Tertullian expected those to be baptized to renounce the devil, his works, and his angels (The Crown 3), and to express belief in God and the Church (Baptism 2; 6; 13).
Roots of Baptism in Scripture and Tradition

• early examinations of candidates for baptism led to the formulations of the faith known as the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed.
  – lex orandi, lex credendi

• reciting a creed, is a renewal of faith
  – in the early Church, candidates for baptism were asked about their faith, phrase by phrase, before they could be baptized
    • And still today
Roots of Baptism in Scripture and Tradition

• “What could be more extraordinary than this, that the Jewish people passed through the midst of the sea? Yet all who made that passage died in the desert. But he who passes through the waters of this font... he who passes through these waters does not die; he rises again.” Ambrose
A Liturgical Approach to Baptismal Theology

• Lex orandi, lex credendi
  – How we pray reflects what we believe
  – What we believe is reflected in how we pray

• Easter Vigil prayer over the baptismal waters
  – the prayer reflects the core elements of our beliefs about baptism
The Multivalent Symbolism of Water

• flows and gives life (wellspring of all holiness)
• in excess is a force of destruction (the waters of the great flood)
• cleanses (make an end of sin, may be cleansed from sin)
The Multivalent Symbolism of Water

• quenches thirst
• cools and refreshes
• generates power
• “Sister water, useful and pure, lowly freeing sharing her life”
What Does Baptism Do?

• Washes us clean of effects of original sin
• Initiates us into the community of faith, the Body of Christ
• Symbolically incorporates us into the death and rising of Christ
• Configures us to Christ
• Makes us a new creation, born again of water and the spirit
Discussion Questions

- What image of baptism appeals to you and why?
- What image of baptism is emphasized with infant baptism?
- What image of baptism is emphasized with adult baptism?
Font Shapes

• Different shapes emphasize different aspects of baptismal theology
Cruciform Fonts

• Emphasize:
  – the cross of Christ
  – sharing in Christ’s suffering and death
St. Francis
University of Portland
Holy Family
San Jose
St. Rita
Wellington, FL
Tomb-Shaped Fonts

• Emphasize:
  – the death of Christ
Good Shepherd Elk Grove
St. Pius X
Omaha
Octagonal Fonts

• Eight represents the first day of the new creation, the day after the Sabbath, the day Christ rose

• Emphasize:
  – The resurrection of Christ
Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament
Sacramento
Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament
Sacramento
St. Katherine Drexel
Jackson
St. Katherine Drexel
Jackson
St. Raphael Cathedral
Dubuque
Divine Savior
Orangevale
Divine Savior
Orangevale
St. Clare
Roseville
St. Clare
Roseville
St. Francis
Old
St. Francis
1993 Proposal
The Church of the Holy Apostles
McHenry, IL
Womb-Shaped Fonts

• Emphasize:
  – transformation
  – new creation
  – being born again
Round or Tub-Shaped Fonts

• Emphasize:
  – Being washed clean of sin
Old St. Mary’s
Chicago
Resurrection
Aptos
Holy Family of Nazareth
Irvine, TX
Other Shapes

• Emphasize:
  – Multivalent symbolism
St. Leo
Tacoma
Christ the King
Las Vegas
St. Jude
New Lenox, IL
Discussion Questions

• What shape do you prefer and why?

• Does your preferred shape emphasize the image of baptism that speaks to you most?