INTRODUCTION

The subject matter of this article, the baptistery and the baptismal font, is treated from the point of view of baptismal symbolism and its relevance to the liturgical life of our parishes. Symbols play an important role in Liturgy. Indeed, it is unthinkable to have a liturgical celebration that does not apply the use of symbols. The development of liturgical theology itself is reflected in graphic representations and symbolisms. The symbolisms of the baptistery and the baptismal font thus reveal to us a profound baptismal theology which reflects the Church's understanding of the Sacrament of Baptism.

And yet, in our day the value of symbols seems to be taken for granted in liturgical celebrations. In the celebration of Baptism, for instance, the importance of the baptismal font is too often overlooked; the important thing, especially in cases where there is a big number of candidates to be baptized, is to pour the water on the candidate's head. This attitude of "getting-it-over-with-fast" sadly impoverishes the richness and symbolic nature of the celebration, to say the least, and ignores the eloquence with which the baptismal font and other liturgical symbols speak to the assembly. This attitude is counterproductive in the long run, although it may seem to be the more practical response at the given moment. For the assembly does not come to a profound appreciation of its coming together as a community convened by God himself to worship him; it does not comprehend the deeper meaning of symbols presented to
it — these are seen as mere external trappings which can be arbitrarily dispensed with; and ultimately, it hardly grows in the appreciation of Liturgy as an authentic expression of an individual’s as well as the community’s life of faith.

We shall briefly look into the history of the development of the baptistery and the baptismal font and the various symbolisms that were attached to them by the early Church. After this brief journey into history, we shall come back to the present and look at the status quaestionis of this liturgical environment, and pose some concrete proposals which we hope will be useful in our pastoral situation.

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF BAPTISTERIES

NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD: THE APOSTOLIC AGE

For this period our readily available source of information is the New Testament. Certainly, we cannot gather much from the writings of the apostles and/or their collaborators with regard to the practice of baptism, but the information we can gather is sufficiently reliable and gives us a glimpse into the practice of baptism.

It is interesting to note that no archeological vestiges related to baptism remain from the first century. Apart from the Jordan River (cf. Mt 3:6) and Aenon, near Salim (cf. Jn 3:23), which have been positively identified as places where baptism was administered, no traces of the baptismal activity of the first century church remain for us. Why is this so? Because baptism was administered in the open air, in ponds or in the sea,¹ or in ordinary

buildings or dwellings with no particular baptismal designation.\textsuperscript{2} Without doubt, the pools of Jerusalem were used on the occasion of the large number of baptisms performed on Pentecost Day, and possibly too the baths in the house of the centurion Cornelius (cf. Acts 10:44 ff.) and that of the jail warden of Philippi (cf. Acts 16:29 ff.), or the pools in the atrium of dwellings then.

THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES

During the second and third centuries, changes began to take place which would affect the practice of baptism in the succeeding centuries.

At the beginning of the second century, we can establish that total immersion was no longer considered the sole manner for administering baptism. The \textit{Didache}, an anonymous document dating back to ca. 90 A.D., gives the following instruction:

As for baptism, baptize in this way: After having said all that precedes, baptize in running water, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. If you do not have running water, baptize in some other water, and if you cannot do it in cold water, do it in warm. If you are without either, then pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Let the baptizer, the one to be baptized, and others who can, fast before the baptism; but order the candidate to fast one or two days beforehand.\textsuperscript{3}

From the foregoing we can deduce that baptism by infusion was already tolerated at this time, but as Buhler\textsuperscript{4} asks, was this tolerance simply theoretical, or was the account a reflection of a rite already practiced? The instruction in the \textit{Didache} was probably an exception to the general practice of total immersion during the paleochristian period. It can however be said that from

\textsuperscript{2} See A. Grabar, \textit{Le baptistère paleochrétienn} (Mulhouse: Centre de culture chrétienne, 1980) 4 and endnote 5, pp. 16-17.


\textsuperscript{4} F. M. Buhler, \textit{Archéologie et Baptême} (Evolution du baptême et des installations baptismales) (Mulhouse: Centre de culture chrétienne, 1986) 6.
the very beginning there was great freedom with regard to immersion.  

In the field of Christian archaeology, an interesting discovery was made in the years 1931-32 at Dura-Europos on the banks of the Euphrates: a house constructed in the first century and used as a meeting place or house church of Christians during the first half of the third century. The house, constructed on the city walls had, apart from the room which served as a meeting place, a baptismal room measuring 3 x 6.5 meters and decorated by frescoes. The rectangular baptismal piscina, measuring 1.25 x 2.5 meters at the exterior, has two free columns and two pilasters rising from the four corners of the piscina and surmounted by a vaulted roof. The baptismal room at the Christian house of Dura-Europos is the only surviving monument from the second and third centuries which attests to the use of a baptistery. Other baptisteries might have existed contemporaneously with it, but of these no literary evidence survives and no archeological traces have been discovered.

In the light of the Christian house at Dura-Europos, we can make some observations on the development of baptisteries in the second and third centuries, thus:

a. Edifices reserved for Christian cult existed less than a century and a half after the death of the last apostle, although these edifices were not constructed originally for cult use but were only later adapted to suit the needs of the Christian community. Hence these edifices did not have any specific architectural character. In the Edict of Milan of 313 A.D., the emperor, Constantine, decreed that places of worship and other goods confiscated from Christians during the persecutions should be restored to them, an indication that the Christian house at

5. To A. Nocent ("L'esperienza del battesimo negli scritti giudeo-cristiani", in La Liturgia, i sacramenti: teologia e storia della celebrazione, Anamnese 3/1 [Genova: Casa editrice Marietti, 1986] 25), in agreement with J. P. Audet (La Didache Instructions des Apôtres [Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, J. Gabalda et Cie., 1958] 357-67), it seems that only the first verse of chap. 7 authentically comes from the time of the Didache. The following verses, 2-4, were later interpolations. Audet and Nocent do not subscribe to the thesis that baptism by infusion is suggested by the Didache. By contrast, W. Rordorff and A. Tuillier are in agreement with A. Benoit (Le Baptême chrétien au second siècle [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953] 8) that baptism by infusion is suggested by the
Dura-Europos is not an isolated case.

b. At the beginning of the third century, the place for baptism began to be defined from the place of meeting and worship. The uninitiated was not allowed into the place of worship without having been first baptized. The development of the baptismal rite, weather conditions during the cold season, and the number of catechumens little by little caused baptism to be celebrated away from the place reserved for cult. Then, too, the feeling of respect for the House of God caused the preparatory rite of exorcism to be conducted outside the place of cult, as the catechumens were as yet deemed unworthy to enter the house church. It would seem natural then to conduct the preparatory rite, as well as baptism itself, in an adjacent room in the house church (later an annex to the basilica). Thus, during the period of the *domus ecclesiae* the liturgical synaxis took place in the main room of the house church, while the initiation rites took place in the atrium and the exedra. Later, the catechumens were allowed to assist at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper from the vestibule of the edifice. We have at Dura-Europos the beginnings of baptisteries constructed independently of the church proper which spread rapidly from the fourth century onwards.

c. Great importance was attached to baptism which resulted in the richness of the mural and ceiling decorations of the baptismal room which contrasted with the whitewashed, austere ambience of the meeting room.

d. Candidates for baptism must have been generally adults, and baptism must have been generally administered by immersion judging from the measurements of the baptismal piscina at Dura-Europos.

The persecutions of the second and third centuries forced the

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*Didache*. They claim that at the time of the *Didache* baptism by infusion was not only reserved to the sick, esp. to the bedridden (*clinici*). Benoit further claims that “La Didache est le premier témoign du baptême par aspersion; celui-ci fut sans doute assez répandu dans la primitive Église, quand les communautés ne pouvaient disposer d’un cours d’eau. Par la suite il devint plus rare, car les églises s’adjoignirent des baptistères...” Ibid. 8-9.

early Christians to go underground, and this must have been the reason for the use of private houses for their religious functions inasmuch as these house churches were less noticeable and therefore less vulnerable than buildings expressly built for religious purposes.

THE FOURTH CENTURY

The changes which began during the second and third centuries continued to spread rapidly during the fourth century. The Edict of Galerius in 311 which ordered the Christians to pray to their God for the health of the emperor and for the safety of the Roman empire as well as for their own wellbeing so that the integrity of the state might be established everywhere presaged the issuance of the Edict of Milan jointly signed by Constantine and Licinius in 313 which put Christianity on par with pagan religion, and paved the way to its becoming the official religion of the Roman empire under Constantine and his successors. As mentioned above, the edict decreed the restoration of edifices and other goods belonging to Christians which had been confiscated during the period of the persecutions.

Owing to the favorable disposition of civil authorities toward Christianity, Christian basilicas began to be erected in great numbers as well as baptisteries attached to them. These baptisteries were constructed according to and inspired by existing architectural models of the period, namely, thermal baths, fountains, mausoleums, etc.

While archeology yields practically no evidence of Christian edifices during the second and third centuries, ample archeological discoveries of Christian edifices dating back to the second half of the fourth century brought to light a number of baptisteries from which we can draw the following observations:

a. Baptistmal piscinas, generally octagonal in the West and cruciform and rectangular or square in the East, were installed in special edifices which signified that baptism was still a necessary condition for entering the church.

b. Baptisteries were decorated with marble (in the case of wealthy communities) or with mosaics depicting symbolic themes which underscore the importance attached to baptism.
c. The size of baptismal piscinas leads us to conclude that baptism must have been administered to adults by complete immersion.

d. We must note that in succeeding centuries, undoubtedly during the fifth and sixth centuries, these same baptismal piscinas underwent a reduction in size and depth. Evidently, this reduction in size and depth of the piscina attests to a change in the liturgy of baptism and the passage from complete immersion of an adult candidate to partial immersion accompanied by infusion, and from complete or partial immersion of children to baptism of infants by infusion. This development, however, did not uniformly take place everywhere; hence we cannot claim that at this point we are faced with a trend veering towards this direction.

FROM THE FIFTH CENTURY ONWARDS

Archeological discoveries of baptisteries dating back to the fifth century confirm that there was no uniform manner in which baptism of adults by immersion passed on to baptism by infusion. In some places the baptismal basin was still big enough to allow the complete immersion of an adult, while in other places these were already too small to accommodate immersion. Equally, we can establish that some baptismal basins have been reduced in size. Baptismal basins of the 6th and 7th centuries discovered in Nubia in northern Africa bear traces of having been reduced, which shows that this development was not confined to Europe alone.

Baptismal piscinas gradually gave way to baptismal fonts and in France, for example, baptisteries as autonomous buildings disappeared by the 9th century. By contrast, in Italy the construction of autonomous baptisteries continued up to the 13th century. Thus, we have, among others, the celebrated baptisteries of Florence, Pisa, Parma, Varese, Volterra, Lenno, Ventimiglia, Albenga, all constructed during this period of change. In these baptisteries, baptismal basins allowed the immersion of adult candidates, even if only partial. It seems that it was only in the 14th century that construction of autonomous or detached baptisteries ceased completely.
II. SHAPES OF BAPTISTERIES

From the common inspiration derived from thermal edifices of the classical age, Christian edifices retain above all the symmetrical construction which allows total visibility of the focal point of the room, in our case, the baptismal piscina. The shape of the external perimeter of the baptistery may vary, as well as the baptismal basin, both of which express a symbolic meaning of baptismal theology.

The earliest baptisteries of the third and fourth centuries were quadrilateral (square or rectangular) in shape, and this type was prevalent in Egypt, Greece, Palestine, North Africa and Syria. It can be safely stated that the quadrilateral shape is the most primitive form of baptisteries (cf. Christian house at Dura-Europos).

In France and Italy, the quadrilateral shape was superseded in the fifth century by round and polygonal shapes. Of these shapes, the polygon, especially the octagon, was the most prevalent.

Round or circular baptisteries are less numerous. The circular and polygonal baptisteries seem to be preferred in the West, while quadrilateral baptisteries seem to be the preference in the East. Typically, the crossroad between these preferences is North Africa where circular and polygonal baptisteries can be found along with quadrilateral ones.

A third type or shape of baptisteries is the trefoil/quatrefoil and the cruciform. Of these, the cruciform is rather rare.

What factors might have influenced the adoption of the

10. For a more complete and comprehensive classification of the different shapes of paleochristian baptisteries and their location, see A. Khatchatrian, *Origine et typologie des baptistères paléochrétiens*. Also DACL, 408-68. Leclercq's classification, though less comprehensive and less detailed than Khatchatrian's, has the advantage of listing the different paleochristian baptisteries according to location, and contains ample bibliography on studies made on individual baptisteries.
quadrilateral shape of baptisteries in the early Church? We venture three probable reasons:

a. When baptism ceased to be administered out of doors and a baptistery was arranged in the house church, it naturally had the shape of an ordinary room.

b. Since the baptismal rite had affinities with bathing, the frigidarium of the Roman baths, often a square or rectangle, had its influence.

c. From NT times baptism was understood in terms of a death and resurrection with Christ; and since many pagan funerary monuments were domed quadrilaterals it was natural to reproduce this design. Its persistence in certain areas is explicable because it was in precisely the same provinces that the square tomb was and continued to be the norm.¹¹

The last factor, i.e., pagan funerary monuments or mausoleums, also influenced the adoption, particularly in Italy, of other shapes common to such monuments, such as the round or circular and hexagonal and octagonal shapes. The circular plan with ambulatory was the plan of many mausoleums and this association was also expressed through the hexagon and the octagon. Other shapes also derived from the same association of ideas. Thus, we have the trefoil, the quatrefoil and the cruciform baptisteries, which relate directly to the manner of Christ's death.¹²

III. THE BAPTISMAL BASIN

SHAPES AND SYMBOLISMS

The variety of shapes of baptisteries is repeated and accentuated in the baptismal basin.¹³ The following shapes occur in various combinations.¹⁴ We shall also look into the various symbolisms attached to these shapes, inasmuch as each of these

¹¹ NDLW, 82.
¹² Ibid.
¹³ Testini, Archeologia cristiana, 632.
¹⁴ See Davies, The Architectural Setting, 19-22; also Testini, Archeologia cristiana, 632-33.
“had its own ideological content, the form being a symbol to convey some aspect of the meaning of baptism.”

a. Quadrilateral (rectangular or square): recalls the tomb of Christ, and gives us an insight into the theology of baptism as the death of the candidate to sin. As he descends into the baptismal piscina, he is buried with Christ “so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father [the newly-baptized], too might live a new life” (cf. Rm 6:4). Testini also claims that the quadrilateral shape also recalls the Cross, the four corners of the world, the tetragram of Yahweh, and the four gospels.

b. Polygon

1. Hexagon: an allusion to the death of Christ on the sixth day of the week. J. G. Davies claims that the hexagonal shape was also understood “to refer to the sixth or present age of man . . .” referred to by St. Augustine in De Civitate Dei, 14.24. The symbolism of this shape is also connected to the baptismal death that awaits the candidate in the piscina.

2. Octagon: this shape seems to be the most prevalent among the shapes assumed by baptisteries and baptismal basins, particularly in the West. The octagon is a symbol of the eighth day, the day of the Resurrection, the day of the new creation, the day of the Lord (dies dominica). The theme of the ogdoade has been much revered since antiquity and is reflected in patristic writings, in the liturgy, and in Christian edifices. In applying the theme of the ogdoade to baptism, the octagon served to emphasize the co-resurrection of the newly-baptized with Christ in baptism and the dawn of the Age to come.

c. Cruciform: connects with the death of Christ (the manner of his death) and therefore with the death of the candidate to

15. Ibid.
20. Ibid.17.
sin with Christ. As John Chrysostom puts it, "Baptism is a cross. What the cross was to Christ and what his burial was, that baptism was to us." 

d. Round/Oval: introduces a different aspect of baptism, namely, that of rebirth (cf. Jn 3:3 ff.). This shape calls to mind the womb, and regards baptism as the rebirth to new life of the newly-baptized. The circular/oval baptistery and font are seen as the womb which generates the children of God who have the Church as their mother.

e. Quatrefoil: a variation of the cruciform shape and is likewise connected with the idea in baptism of death to sin of the candidate.

Of these shapes, as in baptisteries, the most primitive form is the quadrilateral, which is the shape of the baptismal basin of the Christian house at Dura-Europos. The initial adoption of this shape is explicable on the grounds that it is similar to a sarcophagus. The hexagonal, octagonal and cruciform shapes were next adopted, followed by the quatrefoil (ca. 6th century). Apart from France and Spain where the hexagon and the octagon seem to be the preferred shape, no one shape seems to be preferred in any one area, although it may be affirmed that the quatrefoil and the cruciform originated in the East, and from there was introduced into North Africa.

Many baptisteries were also furnished with a movable basin, but adequate knowledge of this is lacking at present. The depth of baptismal basins also varies. It may range from a minimum of 0.35 meter to a maximum of 2 meters. The basin may be dug into the pavement or rise above the pavement and furnished with steps. Of this last type, the maximum height is between 0.90 to 0.94 meters. Whether these basins rising above the pavement were intended for infant baptism is not certain. They might have been also used for the baptism of women converts.

25. See NDLW, ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
who wished to hide their nudity during the baptismal bath. The type of baptism employed — by immersion or by infusion also determined the depth of the basin. A basin 40 centimeters in height obviously could not have been used for baptism by immersion even if the candidates knelt down in it.

FROM THE PISCINA TO THE FONT

In antiquity, baptisteries were constructed above all in view of adult baptism, which also explains the dimension and depth of the baptismal piscina. Around the 7th to the 8th century, when the baptism of infants became the general practice, baptisteries and their piscinas gradually fell into disuse, although autonomous baptisteries continued to be erected after the model of the early Christian ones. Of these, the baptisteries of Florence and Pisa are perhaps the most well known. The reasons for the gradual abandonment of the baptismal piscina are linked with the abandonment of the autonomous baptistery:

a. As the entire population of a country became nominally Christian, thus the virtual cessation of adult baptism, and the consequent preponderance of infant baptism, provisions for undressing in privacy, for which the autonomous baptistery served a purpose, were no longer required. Then, too, the public nature of baptism, with all present professing the same faith, meant that a separate building was no longer necessary. There was no reason then why a simple font should not be placed

28. Testini, Archeologia cristiana, 635.
29. "The fonts themselves . . . give a clue to the actual method used (in the administration of baptism). Strictly speaking, there are four principal methods of baptizing: (1) submersion, when the candidate goes completely below the surface of the water; (2) immersion, when the head is dipped, with or without the candidate standing in the water; (3) affusion, when the water is poured over the head; (4) aspersion, when water is sprinkled on the head. However, method 2 is now rarely used, and the term immersion normally denotes 1. If the dimensions of all the early Christian fonts known are examined, it is evident that the great majority of them were not capable of being used for submersion; only in a few would this have been possible. Hence if baptismal practice were uniform, then it must have been either by immersion or affusion; even in this case the parallelism with burial would not have been lost, since the essential feature of this was the casting of a handful of earth upon the corpse, and affusion does no more than reproduce this action." NDLW, 243.
30. See DACL, 391.
in the church, usually near the door, to indicate that baptism is the means of entrance into the Church.\textsuperscript{31}

b. With the preponderance of infant baptism by the medieval period, the utility and dimensions of the autonomous baptistery and baptismal piscina could not be justified. The celebration of baptism by then had lost its solemnity, having become just an ordinary celebration inside the church. The great feasts of the Epiphany, Easter Vigil and the Vigil of Pentecost, which in antiquity were the times reserved for baptism, were no longer seen as such.

At this point we must note that Christian archeology has illustrated that as early as the fifth and sixth century, some baptismal piscinas built in an earlier period (third century) showed traces of having been modified in terms of width and depth, i.e., made smaller and shallower. These modifications presaged the evolution of the piscina into the font. J. G. Davies traces the evolution of the font from what he terms as the tub-font:\textsuperscript{32}

a. The tub-font was prevalent in the 11th and 12th centuries. It was an unmounted bowl resting on the ground;

b. From the 12th to the 13th centuries, the tub-font was transformed into a polypod (supported by four or more legs);

c. In the 14th century, the polypod tub-font became a monopod; the basin was mounted on a single central shaft, consisting of the bowl, pedestal and base, not quite dissimilar to the baptismal fonts we still see today.

IV. THE BAPTISTERY AND THE BAPTISMAL FONT
   IN THE NEW RITE OF BLESSINGS

The new Roman Rite of Blessings, published in 1984, is a comprehensive collection of rites for various blessings, superseding the former rite heretofore in use.\textsuperscript{33} It contains the \textit{ordo} for the blessing of a new baptistery or a new baptismal font, and we propose to take a brief look into the \textit{praenotanda} to

\textsuperscript{31} See \textit{NDLW}, 83.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{De Benedictionibus} (Rituale Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti Oecumenici
find out how it regards the baptistery and the baptismal font.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE BAPTISTERY
AND THE BAPTISMAL FONT IN THE PRAENOTANDA

The *ordo* is introduced by a *praenotanda* which highlights the importance of the baptistery and the baptismal font in the celebration of the sacrament of baptism. Since baptism is the first among the sacraments of Christian initiation to be administered, cathedrals and parish churches ought to set aside a place for a dignified celebration of the liturgy of baptism.34 Such a place may be a baptistery within the church building itself, or a baptistery especially constructed apart from the church building or a chapel within the church building set apart for the baptismal font.35 As we have shown above, the idea of setting a place apart for the celebration of baptism is not in itself something new in the Church.

Although the octagon is by no means the most primitive among these shapes, it nevertheless seems to be the most prevalent shape assumed especially by baptismal basins. This is understandable since, as we have pointed out, the octagon is a symbol of the mystery of the eighth day, that is, of regeneration and resurrection.36 The number eight, then, is significant in baptismal symbolism in that it stands for the salvation of those who are baptized in the Risen Christ. As J. Daniélou points out, it was, for ancient Christianity, a symbol of the resurrection, which took place after the Sabbath, and therefore, the eighth day. Furthermore, the seven days of the week were the image of time of this world; the eighth day was the image of everlasting life. Sunday, up to our day, is the

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34. *Praenotanda* n. 833.
35. See *Olca*, *Praenotanda generalia* n. 25.
liturgical commemoration of the eighth day, and at the same time a memorial of the resurrection and a prophecy of the world to come. The baptizand enters into this eighth day by baptism. Thus, in the octagon, we are in the presence of a very ancient baptismal symbol. In the construction of a baptistery or of a baptismal font then, it will be good to bear in mind the symbolism conveyed by the octagon.

Today it is more common to find the baptistery within the church building itself. In older churches it is usually located at the narthex of the church, usually a small chapel where the baptismal font is located. The absence of the baptistery in some of the more recently constructed churches is worthy of note; in its stead we find a portable or movable basin mounted on a column which serves as the baptismal font, and which can be wheeled in or out of the sanctuary depending on the demands of the situation. Some older churches have even abandoned the use of their baptisteries and have opted for the movable baptismal font.

In the construction of a baptistery or a baptismal font, care should be taken that these be so constructed so as to allow a dignified and suitable celebration of baptism, whether those to be baptized are infants or adults. What the praenotanda has in mind — in the case of the baptismal font — is a fixed structure made of suitable material which will more effectively highlight the importance of the sacrament of baptism.

The font should be so positioned and located that its connection with the Word of God and the Eucharist, the culmination of the sacraments of Christian initiation, is unmistakably clear. The location of the font with regard to the altar must bring out the initiatory character of the grace of baptism which finds its nourishment and fulfillment in the Eucharist. A more complete image of this intimate link between baptism and the Eucharist can be found in the connection between the three principal liturgical spaces of the baptismal rite: the lectern, the font, and

38. Praenotanda n. 834.
40. Praenotanda n. 835.
the altar. These three elements reflect the three moments of our journey towards salvation. In this context the font really appears as our response to the invitation of Christ in the proclamation of the Good News (lectern). Through baptism we accept the invitation of Christ and render the redemption accomplished by him on the cross — the altar — effective for all. Daily this mystery is renewed; daily Christ issues his call; daily we respond, renewing our incorporation in Christ; and daily, by virtue of this incorporation, we avail of the inexhaustible riches of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ by our participation in the sacrificial banquet of the Father.41

As the womb of the Church through which men are reborn through water and the Spirit, the baptistery ought to be a place worthy of the mystery it celebrates, and as such, must be a place reserved only for baptism.42 On the one hand, the image of the womb, specifically water as womb, is an archetypal image connected with the realms of mystery and darkness as well as with the primordial images of life-giving and regeneration. These images seem to be slowly disappearing in our day and the mythic associations of the baptismal water have retreated farther and farther into the background. But the power of these archetypal images is too great to be ignored. If they are not “sanctified” within a Christian context, they will almost certainly present themselves in demonic forms. Thus, it is one of the most urgent tasks of our day to find a way of allowing baptism to exercise its power within the Christian community at the deepest level of the human psyche. On the other hand, the baptismal font as womb of the Church is directly connected with the idea of the maternity of the Church. As J. Daniélou says, “The Church is the mother of the sons of God; it is through baptism that she brings them forth. So the symbolic meaning of the rite is ready at hand: the baptismal bath (in the font) is the maternal womb in which the children of God are begotten and brought forth.”43 The praenotanda then has reason to stress the importance of reserving a specified place for the baptismal font; it is indeed

42. Praenotanda n. 836.
43. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, 49.
the womb of the Church. This image recurs in the prayer for the blessing of the baptismal font, and quite significantly, in the epiletic part of the prayer.

The baptismal font, if it is located in the baptistery, must be fixed, made of suitable material, must be clean, and allow for baptism by immersion if the occasion warrants it.44 The praenotanda must be referring here to the use of a baptismal pool or piscina. The ordinary baptismal font with which we are familiar could hardly allow for baptism by immersion. Indeed, baptism by immersion brings out more fully the image of the baptizand being buried with Christ and rising with him to new life.

In order to bring out more fully the sign aspect of the baptismal font, it may be so constructed that living water, i.e., flowing water, springs from it.45 The preference of the praenotanda for flowing water, as opposed to stagnant water, is quite clear. This preference dates back to the earliest days of the Church, as we can verify from Hippolytus of Rome.46 Flowing water expresses more fully the sign value of the baptismal font as a spring of living water which provides eternal life to those who drink from and are immersed in it. The praenotanda further adds that in places where necessity dictates so, the water may also be heated.47

CONCLUSION

This exposition has focused itself on the baptistery and the baptismal font as revealed by archeological data and in the rite of blessing. A question poses itself at this point: just how relevant is the baptistery and the baptismal font in actual pastoral practice? The question springs from their perceived state of affairs in parishes in the Philippines. In many parish churches today, the traditional baptistery has been abandoned. We have

44. See OICA, Praenotanda generalia n. 22.
45. See OICA, Praenotanda generalia nn. 18-21.
47. Praenotanda n. 837. See OICA, Praenotanda generalia n. 20.
already mentioned that instead of the baptismal font in the baptistery, a portable vessel is preferred to hold the baptismal water in the sanctuary because it is more convenient to use, and the rite of Baptism performed in the sanctuary has the advantage of being easily seen and followed by those present without much difficulty. More than mere convenience, we can understand that pastoral exigency dictated this shift from the baptistery to the sanctuary, from the baptismal font or pool to the portable vessel. However, the point that the rite of blessing we mentioned wishes to make, it seems, is to restore the original dignity of the baptismal font as a liturgical-architectural symbol, and the dignity of the baptistery as a liturgical space.

I was fortunate enough to spend five years in the pastoral apostolate both in Manila and in Mindanao, and have presided at countless baptismal liturgies. One of the difficulties I encountered in the celebration of Baptism in these places is how to maintain a good pastoral sense during the celebration, and at the same time retain the dignity proper to the liturgy of Baptism, especially when this is celebrated during fiesta and Christmas time. It is indeed difficult to maintain this balance when one has to preside at the Baptism of 200-300 screaming infants! The parishes where I was assigned to did not have either baptisteries or baptismal fonts, and even if they did, how practical, not to say pastoral, would have been the use of the baptismal font? It would probably have taken several hours to finish just one group of infants!

The perennially pointed-out problem of the overworked pastor, who practically had to do everything by himself, also comes to the fore. Even if he could use a baptismal font, how practical would it have been, given the time constraint (almost noon) — everyone is already tired and listless by then, the babies are screaming because of the stifling heat inside the church, and the presiding priest is already drained of energy from the series of masses he had celebrated earlier, and to top it all, he has not taken a morsel of food since breakfast. Walking down the center

48. In the Philippines, the town fiesta and Christmas Day are favorite times for Baptisms. Even if parishes have a regular, weekly schedule of Baptisms, the parishioners usually prefer to wait for the town fiesta or Christmas Day to have their babies baptized. One reason they give is economic: they want to save by having two celebrations in one — the fiesta (or Christmas) and the baptism of the baby — fair enough!
aisle of the church and baptizing the infants held by their mothers at the pews, though perhaps not the ideal way of presiding at Baptism, was nevertheless the more practical, more efficient, and more convenient, perhaps even the more pastoral, way at his disposal.

This scene is repeated all over the Philippines during fiesta time and Christmas Day. And so, a portable vessel — actually a soup bowl — and a plastic pitcher are used during Baptisms. In far-flung mountain village chapels where the poverty of the rural folk is quite evident, one had to content oneself with the use of an ordinary plastic drinking glass or a catsup bottle to contain the baptismal water; to ask for something better at that moment would have been to make unreasonable demands, if not to appear downright snobbish. In cases like these, perhaps a decent-looking crystal bowl and pitcher, or, if crystal glass is too expensive, at least an aluminum bowl and decently-shaped pitcher can be procured beforehand, and reserved especially for use at baptismal liturgies. Poverty is never an excuse for sloppiness. The bowl and pitcher may be decorated with flowers which are available at no cost in Philippine villages.

However, the problem perhaps does not lie so much in the lack of a baptistery or a baptismal font in many parish churches, as in the appreciation of these symbols of the sacrament of Baptism by the clergy and laypeople alike. Towards this end, the task that lies at hand is to encourage a good catechesis on the importance of the baptistery and the baptismal font. It is not only up to the episcopal conference nor to individual bishops to foster and promote such catechesis. The pastor himself must be aware of the significance of the baptismal font for a meaningful celebration of Baptism. One cannot dismiss the baptismal font as a preoccupation of "armchair liturgists," for as the prayer for the blessing of a new baptismal font will show us the font itself inspires a liturgical theology all its own. To disregard it, then, would be to deny the assertions of the ancient Church Fathers as to its value in the liturgy of Baptism. Such would be tantamount to closing one's ears to the voices of centuries which have recognized the dignity of baptismal symbols in the celebration of Baptism. A need for baptismal symbols has to be felt, before their dignity can be restored.