

Johann Ludovici, Baptismal Sermon for a Moor (1661)

Abstract

The term “Moor” [*Mohr*] has been used in German since the sixteenth century to refer primarily to people of color. In the Early Modern period, the term was sometimes used in a prejudicial or racist manner. In the context of the following baptismal sermon from Osnabrück in 1661, Johann Ludovici uses the term “Moor” as a synonym for an unbaptized person (“heathen”). The baptisms of adults who were not of the Christian faith were often staged as public events. In addition, in Protestant areas, the baptismal sermons written for such occasions were often circulated in print.

Source

Johann Ludovici, *Baptismal Sermon for a Moor, delivered at the baptism of a Moor who was incorporated into the Body of Christ in the Church of Saint Mary in Osnabrück on May 18, 1661, and, as requested, printed by Johann Ludovici, Mindano Pastor at the Church of Saint Catherine and superintendent there. With an added outline of the ceremonies surrounding this baptism of a Moor.* [Printed in] Osnabrüg: Bey Johann Georg Schwandern, 1661.

To the noble, steadfast, educated Gerhard Schepeler I.V.D, Mayor and Local Councilor in Osnabrück, etc.

My highly respected gentleman,

the centurion in Capernaum achieved great and immortal praise and fame for not abandoning his servant, stricken with palsy, to lie about like a dog, but rather to display compassion and love by *interceding* on the servant’s behalf with Christ in search of advice and merciful help. And so it is fitting that all lords and masters of the house should, in accordance with Paul’s teaching, concern themselves for their servants and households and foster their salvation and piety. God will richly reward them for this, for the Lord will save whoever offers aid to the thirsty, protecting him in times of strife and guarding over his life and letting him prosper, etc. On the other hand, those who care nothing for their households are worse than heathens and have denied their faith. And thus it will be that you, most noble and learned sir, become without a doubt renowned among those of both the upper and lower classes, when these hear how the same [i.e., you] have shown such compassion for a poor stranger, this Moor, a servant and member of your household, providing for his salvation and blessedness as a Christian father and showing him such mercy that he now wishes to become blessed himself and presents himself here for baptism to that end: And have no doubt, that the Almighty will repay all the compassionate Christian deeds and benevolence shown to the poor lad by bestowing lavish blessings upon this man and his family, as I wish him from the bottom of my heart.

Your most noble and learned lordship is hereby to receive in accordance with your request the straightforward sermon delivered on the occasion of the Moor’s baptism with its recommendation of your dearly beloved wife, children, and entire household to God’s grace and protection. Your most noble and learned lordship’s loyal and sincere intercessor and servant, M. Johannes Ludovici

[...]

We have today, before our own eyes, a quite similar example of the conversion of a Moor in the person of this lad, born a Moor, whom his most noble and learned lordship, O. Gerhard Schepeler, the burgomaster and councilor,

purchased from a West Frisian merchant named Samuel Schmidt five years ago in the year 1656 in Hamburg. Schmidt himself had brought the boy from Africa: Schmidt purchased the four-year-old from Dutch soldiers in the kingdom and state of Guinea after having noticed the boy playing along the seashore as he drove past. When the boy was handed over [to Schepeler], this merchant reported that the boy had not yet been baptized, and testified, with tears welling up in his eyes, to his good character in the seven years since he had been in Schmidt's possession. He had a sense of the lad's pious disposition and had prayed to the Almighty that the might be encouraged to be baptized, but the preacher in their place of residence had refused to do so on account of the lad's age: now, however, that the boy was approximately fifteen years old and had a heartfelt desire to be baptized, on which account he had repeatedly and tearfully pleaded and entreated to be baptized, the aforementioned doctor had earnestly arranged in a Christian manner for the boy, as a member of his household, to be prepared to undergo the fitting means of achieving blessedness, namely, the bath of rebirth, holy baptism, without further omission or delay. To this end, he sent him first to be instructed in the Christian teaching of the Gospel until the reverend pastor here considered him to be proficient and willing to accept the sacrament of holy baptism. This was a praiseworthy deed of Christian love on behalf of this poor, strange boy, for when one effects the conversion of a sinner from the fallacy of his path, one saves the soul from death.

Thus we now desire to bring the Moor present here to holy baptism in the name of God, which is something entirely unheard of in this place and which has never been experienced nor seen in this town for as long as anyone can remember. Before we proceed with the baptismal liturgy, however, let us consider and examine several themes in the story that has been read [Acts 8:36–39], a story which applies so clearly and well to this case, namely: *Aethiopsis Baptismum*, in other words, how Phillip baptized the Moor.

May God our heavenly father richly bestow upon us the mercy and gifts of the Holy Spirit for the sake of his dear Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

[...]

One could draw a number of different morals from these exchanges; we want to expand briefly only on those which relate to our present task of the Christian baptism of a Moor, namely: how one is to deal with an adult person who has come of age and was not baptized as an infant but who now desires baptism and to commit himself to the Lord Christ and his Church and confess [the faith]? This doctrine is present here and thus is seldom applied, for such individuals are rare. The answer here is that such adults and those individuals who were not baptized as children—regardless of whether they were born outside of the Church to Turkish, Jewish, or heathen parents—cannot and should not be denied holy baptism, for Christ's statement regarding the children also applies to the adults: Let the children come to me and do not hinder them [Matt. 19:14], and, in another place, no one who comes to me shall be driven away [John 6:37]. Moreover, the adults are sinners, as well, conceived and born in sin and raised therein: They are thus flesh born of flesh and thus just as in need of being reborn as the tiny children, and the words Peter spoke to the Jews applied just as much to the adults: This promise applies to you and your children and all those who are far away to whom our God will call [Acts 2:39]. The adults, however, are first to receive information and be instructed in Christian doctrine and the Articles of Faith, so that they understand these ahead of time and can publicly profess their faith.

The instruction must necessarily come first in the case of such individuals, so that they learn to recognize their sins against the Commandments, for the awareness of sins comes via the Commandments, and they should experience heartfelt regret and penitence for these. And they should be taught from the Gospel and the articles of our Christian Apostolic faith how they might be comforted for these sins, that it is certainly true and a valuable

word that Jesus Christ came into this world to save the sinner and make him holy and that he suffered on account of our sins under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, and rose from the dead for our salvation, etc.

The apostles also adhered to and observed these methods and order [of instruction], as one can read in the account of how, on Pentecost, three thousand souls in Jerusalem were converted by Peter's preaching [Acts 2:14–42], after which they asked Peter and the other apostles: Men, dear brothers, what should we do? To which Peter answered: Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sin. And Saint Peter instructed the centurion Cornelius with an eloquent catechismal sermon before Peter saw fit to baptize him [Acts 10]. Paul and Silas preached God's Word to the jailor in Philippi before they baptized him [Acts 16:25–40]. This is then the way one should deal with all heathens who are not within the Church, so that they may be instructed in the Articles of Faith before one baptizes them and incorporates them into the Christian Church. And this is also Christ's command to the Apostles, which he gave in his instructions: Go forth and teach all the peoples, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is here proceeded by teaching.

This method and order were also observed and honored in 1573 in Halle in Saxony, when the superintendent there, M. Samuele Boethius, instructed a Turk in the central tenets of the catechism and publicly examined him, and then, after his public declaration of the Christian faith, baptized him.

And in the present case of this lad from the land of the Moors [*Mohrenland*] this [practice] has also been so observed and honored. He has been diligently instructed in the catechism, has been examined before our minister, as has learned the five central tenets of the catechism by heart, as he will show by speaking the Confession of Faith openly after the sermon and before receiving Holy Baptism in front of the entire congregation. He has thus not been forced to accept the Christian faith and Holy Baptism, but rather he has a heartfelt desire and has earnestly pleaded and prayed for it. O this blessed desire! Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

That's enough on the conversations between the [Ethiopian] eunuch and Phillip and what doctrinal lessons we draw from this account.

Shall we proceed to the third topic, namely, the *baptismum ipsus*, the baptism itself, of the Moor and how it took place? The Evangelist Luke reports this in the words we have heard: "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Phillip and the eunuch; and he baptized him."

Here the baptism of the eunuch or Moor is described to us. This baptism was quite similar to that of Christ, for he was baptized in the Jordan [River] by John, and both went down into the water of the Jordan and John himself baptized Christ the Lord. In the same way, Phillip does so with the eunuch. One hears nothing here to indicate that Phillip used salts, oils, or chrism or any other superstitious ceremonies, like those which the papacy employ in their baptisms. We Protestants do not use such things in our baptisms because they are not founded in God's Word or Apostolic practice. Instead, we keep things simpler in our Protestant baptism and maintain the method and practice which Philip and the other Apostles observed and used, and this has two essential elements, which in the schools are called *Materiam & Formam*; for a proper baptism one needs water and the words which Christ commanded to the Apostles, that they baptize with water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[...]

Source: Johann Ludovici, *MOHREN Tauff=Predigt / Welche bey angestelter Tauffe eines Mohren / so zu Osnabrüg in St. Marien Kirch am 18. Maij st. N. Anno 1661 durch die Heilige Tauffe dem HERRN Christo zugeführet und einverleibet worden / Gehalten / Und auff begehren zum Druck übergeben / Von M. IOHANNE LUDOVICI, Mindano, Past. zu St. Catharinen und Superintend daselbst. Mit beygefügetem Verzeichniß / wie und mit was Cermonien solche Tauffe des Mohren verrichtet.* Osnabrüg: Bey Johann Georg Schwandern, 1661, pp. 2–3, 7–8, 21–24. Available online at: <http://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?PPN821063391>

Translation: Ellen Yutzy Glebe

Recommended Citation: Johann Ludovici, *Baptismal Sermon for a Moor* (1661), published in: *German History Intersections*, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/germanness/ghis:document-254>> [December 09, 2023].