



**SIGNIFICANCE OF WATER IN THE LIFE AND DEATH OF  
THE CHRISTIAN MAN: HISTORY OF SWIMMING AND  
WATER RESCUE**

***SIGNIFICADO DEL AGUA EN LA VIDA Y MUERTE DEL  
HOMBRE CRISTIANO: HISTORIA DE LA NATACIÓN Y  
EL RESCATE ACUÁTICO***

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Recibido: 14/07/2022

Aceptado: 21/09/2022

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## RESUMEN

El agua es un símbolo esencial de la vida "Sin agua, la vida no existiría", una antítesis se encuentra cuando también puede quitarte la vida, ahogarte. Cada vida perdida tiene un valor incalculable, un famoso autor retrató este significado citando "Creo que la vida de un hombre es superior a todas las riquezas que la fortuna puede proporcionar". El hombre y el agua han tenido una relación desde el inicio de su existencia destacándose por su valor e importancia en la cristiandad. En el Antiguo Testamento con Isaías (I 40,3-5) menciona el agua como símbolo del Espíritu de Dios y alegoría de su obra (Mt 3,13-17). Con Jesucristo, el agua para los israelitas era conocida como señal de ablución. Su significado en la fe cristiana es a través del bautismo, con el que comienza la predicación de Jesús. Bautismo viene del griego "baptisma" (inmersión-acción de sumergir). El no sumergirse, con origen etimológico de bautismo, es el accidente llamado ahogamiento.

*Palabras clave:* religión cristiana, ahogamiento, historia, agua.

## ABSTRACT

Water is an essential symbol of life "Without water, life would not exist", an antithesis is found when it can also take away your life, drowning. Every life lost has a countless value, a famous author portrayed this significance quoting "I believe that the life of a man is superior to all the riches that fortune can provide". Man, and water have had a relationship since the beginning of their existence being noted for its value and importance in Christianity. In the Old Testament with Isaiah (I 40.3-5) he mentioned water as a symbol of God's Spirit and allegory to his work (Mt 3.13-17). With Jesus Christ, water for people from Israel, was known to be as a sign of ablution. Its significance in the Christian faith is through baptism, with which the preaching of Jesus begins. Baptism comes from the Greek "baptisma" (immersion-act of immersing). The failure to submerge, with the etymological origin of baptism, is the accident called drowning.

*Keywords:* christian religion, drowning, history, water.

## I. INTRODUCCIÓN

The This bibliographic review is focused on the main core the research: the history of water in the life of man, highlighting the inherent significance among the Christian religion, life and death, highlighting drowning.

## II. OBJECTIVES

1. To know historically the connection between water and man throughout life and its significance in Christian religion.
2. To research the meaning of baptism and the contrast reflected by the water of life and death.
3. To relate baptism with water drowning through the etymological meaning of the sacramental rite.
4. To make a chronological line of the most important events about the contact of man and water: swimming and water rescue.

## III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To get a large part of the information, databases such as ISOC-CSIC, SCOPUS and Teseo have been used. On the other hand, numerous historical events have been extracted based on scientific journals such as Scielo, Redalyc and Dialnet.

Deepening Christian aspects in which most of the testimonies are collected from the Bible, the Old and New Testaments and a lesser part has been obtained from GlobeTheoLib, a digital library with a multitude works related to theology and Christian religion.

## IV. RESULTS

### CHAPTER I - WATER: MEANING THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF CIVILIZATIONS

"Water is, in the first place, the source and power of life, without it the earth is nothing more than an arid desert, a country of hunger and thirst, in which men and animals are meant to die" (León, 1972).

It's undeniable the power of water and its importance, "Without water, life would not exist" (León, 1972), and "it is present in everything that lives (Monforte & Cantú, 2009; Khrouz, 2017).

Researching the symbolic richness of water, we delve into several religions, beliefs and civilizations where human beings have woven multiple meanings through historical events, owning different cultures of water. In most of creation of the world myths, water represents the source of life and divine energy of earth fertility and living beings. The great religions and spiritual paths express their charm by the waters through cosmic, initiation and purification rites (Ferro, 2006).

Since immemorial time Chinese culture have worshiped its rivers and seas, that's why it is said that this vital liquid gushes out, invigorates and runs through all of Chinese history (Liang, 2015). On the other hand, and not in the same way, throughout the history of Hindu culture, water sources are commemorated as sacred, deserving of reverence and respect (González et al., 2018).

The Ganges River according to Hindu mythology is said to be born in the heavens. The function of the Ganges, mediator between the real and the divine world, is illustrated in the mortuary rituals of the Hindus, where the ashes of the ancestors and relatives are thrown into the river to have a reliable transition to the heavens (Shiva, 2003).

The Greek can be considered as the third culture, narrated through an outstanding well-known person such as Thales of Miletus, reproduced by Aristotle, the statement: "The beginning of things is water." In addition to this thought, Aristotle refers to Thales supposing that "the Earth floated on water", which emphasizes that everything is water or that everything is made up of water, and together with this, giving it a belief, he claimed "the divine is like water: something that changes shape but is, at the same time, always the same (an eternal principle)" (Cervio, 2012).

For Asian and African people, water is taken as part of the divinities; the sources are sacred or venerated and are used as a purifying element. One of the best known goddesses in Afro religions is the goddess Iemanjá, who for believers, is the queen and goddess of the waters, an expression of the divine presence (Ferro, 2006).

Crossing the borders of the Americas, the Mexican civilization stands out where "water was a way of life that integrated all dimensions of existence, understood as the environment, the economy, transportation, military strategy, religion and food., among others" (Perló & González, 2006).

Focusing on the transcendence of water in the Christian religion, we study its terminological appearance going back to distant times, where "water" is cited 582 times in the Old Testament and about 80 times in the New. The richness of the use of vocabulary Regarding water, it is very rich in the sacred text, and collects all the aspects that are related to it.

There is a terminology that refers to meteorological phenomena: rain (autumn, winter, spring), dew, frost, snow, hail, hurricane; a geographical terminology: ocean, abyss, sea, source, (living water), river, torrent, (deluge, flood); another that refers to provisioning: well, canal, cistern, reservoir; and also the concepts that indicate its use: water, drink, quench thirst, immerse (baptize),

wash, purify, pour (Girlanda, 1990). In the Christian man, the significant rite with water is baptism, which gives entrance and guides man towards the ultimate goal of every Christian; eternal life (Contreras, 1998).

One of the first examples in the Bible of this practice is the passage which relates the preaching and baptism of John the Baptist. But for the Catholic Church water also represents in baptism, new life, since it is raised from the water to be born again. In this way, baptism is connected to death, but at the same time, with life (Rodríguez, 2009). Hence, water owns a vast power of symbolization, since it contains the entire spectrum of meanings that go from life to death (Rosso, 1988).

The two most significant narratives in our religion are that the Great Flood and the Passage of the sea, both are typical examples of the curse (salvific punishment) and the blessing throughwater (Boismard, 1982).

## CHAPTER II - BAPTISM AND THE WATER BATH: THE SUBMERGENCE OF MAN

In this section we will focus on baptism, being one of the most characteristic Christian rituals, where water is the main element. The origin of baptism is considered uncertain (Groenewald, 2003). Collins (1996), suggests that early Christian baptism originated from John's baptismal practice, being one of the earliest examples depicted in the Bible.

The early Christian religion soon became a symbol system, beginning with Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God after his baptism by John (Theissen, 1999). One of those preaching was reflected in Mathews (Mt, 28.19-20): "Go and make all people my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

One of the meanings for the Catholic Church about the water of baptism, also known as the "entrance door" represents —and means— new life, since it is raised from the water to be born again (Rodríguez, 2009).

In fact, Jesus himself makes a reference to this meaning when he tells Nicodemus: "One must be born again by water" (John, 3-5). In this way, baptism is related to death but at the same time, and in a very special way, to life. Through water the old man dies united to sin, to rise together with Jesus in baptism and thus have eternal life (Sada & Monroy, 1997).

Moreover, the rite of baptism has meant and signifies a way to reject and keep away evil. Consequently, its apotropaic meaning points directly to trying to ward off (spiritual) death with the life that is obtained through baptism

(Rodríguez, 2009). Finally, another significance is that baptism is considered a rite of passage. Symbolically, rites like these represent the legitimate crossing of a boundary, bringing with it a new identity with new rights and responsibilities for the faithful (Van Staden, 2001).

Despite the fact that over the time the baptismal rite has undergone some alterations in terms of the way it is applied, the symbolic meaning and its significance have been maintained over time.

Today the new rite of baptism reformed by the Second Vatican Council consists of four moments: rite of reception, liturgy of the word, liturgy of the sacrament and final rites (CEEL, 1970). Studying the term baptism terminologically, it comes from the Greek name "baptisma" (immersion- the act of immersing in a liquid) and this word is also derived from the Greek verb "baptizo" which is the intensive form of the verb "bapto", which means "Dip" (Piper, 2016).

The central rite of baptism can be performed by immersion, "a sacramental sign that more clearly expresses participation in the death and resurrection of Christ" (Aldazabal, 1984), or as currently by infusion of water on the child's head, accompanied by one or the other with the Trinitarian formula, which allows the understanding of the new and mysterious relationships of the baptized with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Nocent, 1987).

These two opposite sides to the way of performing the act of baptism with water are presented below: confessionists state that baptism is "administered correctly" by pouring or sprinkling, and that immersion "is not necessary." "Administered correctly" meant that pouring or sprinkling had biblical support (Battle, 2007). On the other hand, the immersionists claim that the Greek word baptize (bapti / zw baptizo) means to immerse, and they rely on the command of Jesus in Matthew (Mt, 28.19) where he quotes: "submerge all nations." Stating that if it were used in any other way it would be disobedience to the mandate (Ramsbotom, 1997).

Unifying the etymological meaning of baptism by immersion or the act of immersing together with the meaning of death, both terms together "death by immersion" leads us to the definition according to Roll (Roll, 1918), that is the result of obstructing the breathing of obstruction of the mouth and nose through a fluid, generally water.

This accident that occurs between man and water brings the symbolism of this element closer to death once again. The first evidence of this accident, synonymously called drowning, appears in a myth with great relevance in Greco-Roman times (V-IV BC), the legend of Hero and Leander.

Since the young merchant Leandro had fallen in love with Hero, priestess of the goddess Aphrodite (Venus for the Romans), but they had two problems to consummate their love: first, Hero's family opposed that love and, secondly, they lived separated by the Strait of the Elespont (Dardanelles).

Thus, every night Leandro would swim across the strait guided by a lamp lit at the top of a tower by Hero. But one stormy winter night the lamp went out, Leandro lost his way, and overwhelmed by a stormy sea, he perished. The next morning, Hero saw her lifeless body floating in front of her tower and, distraught with such a fatal event, he threw himself from the top, drowning with it (Llana et al., 2011).

Drowning has been present since the beginning of history, but today it has become one of the causes of globalized induced death (WHO, 2017), becoming an important public issue that demands worldwide attention (WHO, 2008; 2016). They highlight that approximately 0.7% of all deaths worldwide are due to unintentional drowning (Szpilman et al., 2012). This means that more than 1000 deaths occur per day worldwide from this cause (Abelairas et al., 2017).

A large number of studies show that it is one of the major causes of death worldwide (Peden & McGee, 2003; Chalmers & Morrison, 2003; Browne et al., 2003) and the term drowning by submersion is defined as the process of experiencing respiratory failure due to submersion or immersion in a liquid medium, generally water (Van Drop et al., 2003; Beeck et al., 2005). 80% of all drownings can be prevented (Semple & Campwala, 2014), with a professional figure capable of carrying out both preventive and intervention strategies: the aquatic lifeguard (Palacios et al., 2018) whose responsibility is focused on monitoring and caring for the bathing areas as well as solving any aquatic incident (Zumbrunnen & Fouace, 2001) whose ultimate objective is to avoid the loss of human life.

This instinct to save lives and the survival of man in the water has ancestral origins that allow us to know this relationship of this element that houses a significant contrast of life and death, in a scientific and theological way, being the protagonist of sacramental rites such as baptism and of sacred scriptures such as the universal flood.

### CHAPTER III - MAN AND CONTACT WITH WATER: SWIMMING AND WATER RESCUE

The closely dependent relationship between the development of life and the presence of an aquatic environment has existed since the origin of species and is repeated with each individual birth. Man, as a biological being, does not escape this evidence.

Evolution has arranged the development of the egg, after the embryo and the human fetus in the aquatic environment (Palacios et al., 2018). The first nine months of our existence are spent immersed in water, within the womb (Zumbrunnen & Fouace, 2001). And later at birth until the fifth month, we innately possess a swimming reflex that will later be lost, needing certain motor patterns for an autonomous and safe stay in the environment (Fayanás, 2011; Batalla, 2000; García, 2010).

But, how long has man developed swimming patterns for his permanence in the aquatic environment? There is a theory called the Aquatic Ape Hypothesis where it is postulated that humans evolved through an aquatic stage during which they lived largely in water. This theory was first discussed in print by Max Westenhöfer in the 1940s and developed by Alistair Hardy (1896-1985) (Bergman, 2007).

We know that man's relationship with the sea has been a constant throughout history, used as a source of food and as a transport system, which led to the economic and commercial development of different human societies. However, in line with the human capacity to try to overcome its own limitations, human societies develop methods to try to face the dangers of the sea, trying to avoid the loss of human life (Pérez y Verdes, 2010).

The sea contained great dangers, claiming lives as payment for its advantages. These dangers have been reflected in myths, stories, and legends, such as the one previously told, which tried to show the fear to the unknown and its immensity. "It is therefore coined that the origin of rescue was born with the idea of a human action to prevent the death of a person. In other words, rescue is an acquired skill resulting from various factors that forced man to use it and which has also formed an indissoluble part of the evolution of the human species (Peresenda, 2001).

Looking for answers to the domain and the techniques developed in the aquatic environment, they show us (Gosalvez & Joven, 1997) that, "swimming is a practice that is not known for sure when it begins, it is not even very clear how to swim, Although, it is contemplated that for over 200,000 years that Homo Sapiens Sapiens has been on earth, we only have archaeological remains that prove human swimming activity in the last 7,000 years (WHO, 2016).

The first evidence of swimming was discovered in March 1933 in Zerzura (border between Libya and Sudan), by the hand of Laszlo Almasy, a famous Hungarian explorer (Clarys, 1996), discovering some caverns whose walls were full of cave paintings: giraffes, antelopes, oryx, etc., although what was really



extraordinary were figures of men swimming. He called it the cave of swimmers (Cave of swimmers), they were dated around 4,500 BC (Arellano & Pardillo, 2003).

Following the line of time, different elements indicate the use of different systems of aquatic immersion and swimming by the human being, whose objective ranges from merely economic issues (harvesting of mollusks, ...) to military strategy. In this sense, a bas-relief from the palace of the Persian king Assurbunipal in 880 BC, shows scenes of immersion and his teaching as a military resource.

Figure 1. Bas-relief of Assurbunipal (880 BC).



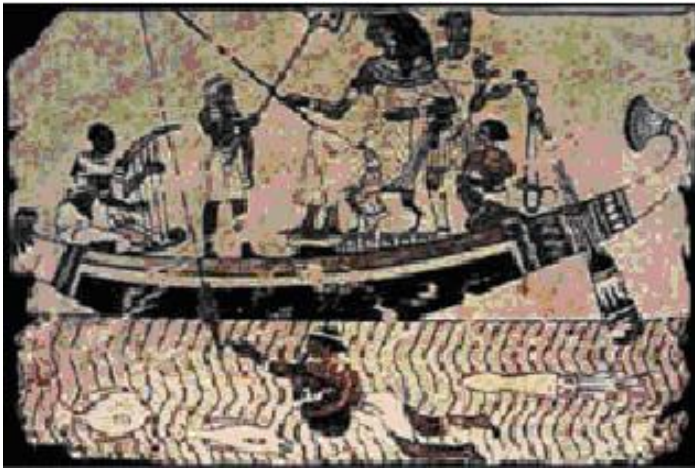
In the Babylonian world, two reliefs also show us the flight by swimming of several soldiers, one of whom used the mussuk (float made with skins swollen with air). (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Babylonian relief of the soldiers' swimming flight.



Another evidence is found in the framework of the Roman conquest of Greece, where Perseus, king of Macedonia, throws the treasures of his palace into the sea after the defeat at Pidna (168 BC), the Romans having to employ groups of divers to recover their booty. Rome will be in charge of definitively focusing swimming and diving techniques to war development, with the creation of a specialized amphibian corps, the *Urinatores* (Figure 3), whose first action is part of the civil war between Julius Caesar and Cneo Pompeyo (Ávila, 1989). Along with its military function, this type of training was also intended for the rescue of soldiers during maritime campaigns.

Figure 3. Specialized amphibious equipment. *Urinatores*.



So it is possible to confirm that in the same way as swimming, water rescue has existed within society for many years, although in the past it was not called a "name", it is obvious that it appears at the moment in which man begins to relate to the aquatic environment (Abraldes, 2007), stating that since ancient times mankind has developed techniques to solve problems and aquatic rescue does not escape this need (Rivera, 2002).

#### CHAPTER IV - THE DEVELOPMENT OF SWIMMING AND WORLD WATER RESCUE: XV-XX CENTURY

At the end of the 15th century, during the Renaissance, the importance of optimism and energy was realized in man, since he had to face the social demands that progress had introduced. This led to more attention being paid to physical exercises, reawakening interest in swimming (Moreno, 2009).

The first known printed book on the subject "swimming", an "incunabula" of this sport, was published in 1538 in Germany and its author is Nicolás Wynman, the title of his work is "Colymbetes" or "The swimmer or art of swimming" (Domínguez, 2015). On the other hand, the work of Digby, a professor at St. John's College, stands out. He had a much more technical vision, so he described different skills and positions; aspect that marked that it was better known and translated. Digby's treatise has been considered the first book on modern swimming (Krüger, 2002; Orme, 2005).

In 1658, William Percey wrote "The Compleat Swimmer", in which he follows Digby's postulates but introduces interesting personal contributions, being the first author to recommend swimming for women. Another book based on Digby's was the one written by Melichedeck Thevenot published in 1696 and was entitled "L'Art de Nager". This was the most influential Swimming manual for the next two centuries (Llana et al., 2012). We also name Légrand (Légrand, 1998) who described the symbolic nature of the relationships between the act of swimming, its practices and the imaginaries of the human condition. For the author, the act of swimming contains various symbolisms such as "swimming to avoid water", "swimming to save oneself", the "swimming hero" or "swimming as an initiatory act" or also the sports world.

All these outstanding works lay the foundations for the emergence of swimming, not only as a technique aimed at rescue and the world of war but also the world of sports.

From the aspect of the history of rescue with a symbolism of "swimming to save oneself", the pedagogue Comenius (1592-1670) considered in the work *Orbis Pictus* the importance of knowing how to swim as an act of survival that every subject must learn (Plá-Clampás, 2015). Later in 1798 according to Llana, Pérez, Del Valle, and Sala (Llana et al., 2012), Guts Muths wrote in *Kleines Lehrbuch der Schwimmkunst zum Selbstunterrichte* (Small Manual of the Art of Swimming): "Until now, drowning has been fashionable, and it is because swimming has not yet become fashionable".

In view of this problem, in the Americas, beginning with the United States, the history of rescue began in 1785 when the "Massachusetts Human Society" was created. This society was made up of volunteer lifeguards. In the late 1800s, swimming began to emerge as a very popular form of recreation, and the need to rescue distressed swimmers became apparent. Members of the US Rescue Service eventually became part of the US Coast Guard, emerging a new type of rescue: protecting the lives of swimmers on the beach (USLA, 2014).

Later, the lack of a constant presence of lifeguards in all bathing areas led the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) to develop a voluntary National Life Saving Service in 1912. But it was in 1914, Wilbert E. Longfellow established the "American National Red Cross", which trained swimmers across the United States in rescue and resuscitation (Branche & Stewart, 2001) under the slogan: "every person a swimmer, every swimmer a lifeguard". This phrase collects the approach of the moment, with a marked voluntarist character in lifeguard, linked to people with qualities for swimming and with a marked sense of solidarity. And at the same time, new elements that favor the rescue of lifeguards began to be incorporated. Harry Sheffield presented the first rescue float (1897), and later Duke Kahanamoku introduced and presented the rescue table (1913) (American Red Cross, 1995). In 1915 the "United States Coast Guard" was created (Palacios, 2000).

Fifty years later in 1964, the "United States Lifesaving Association" (USLA) was created as the highest authority on lifeguard, rescue and aquatic activities in the United States (Palacios, 1998). This association was incorporated into the State of California, as an educational and non-profit organization, in 1966 with the denomination "National Surf Life Saving Association of America" (NSLSA) but in 1979 it changed its name to reflect more properly the scope of your association and include all open water and surf lifeguards in it (Branche & Stewart, 2001). In Australia the "Surf Life Saving Association" was founded in 1984 (USLA, 1981). Later, in 1971 (March 24), the "World Life Saving" (WLS) was founded in Cronulla (Near South Wales - Australia) (ILSF, 1994). In Argentina, the lifeguard profession began thanks to the first training course given by Daniel Enrique Villafañe in 1934. On that same date, the first Rescue Detachment of the Argentine Red Cross was founded (Civardi, 2017). In Brazil the lifeguard was officially started in 1918, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, by Commodore Wilbert Longfellow of the American Red Cross. However, it was in 1994, in Wales, United Kingdom, that Brazil made official contact with a world rescue organization and curiously it was exactly the moment when the International Life Saving Federation (ILS) was born. The result was a great motivation for the foundation of the Brazilian Rescue Society - SOBRASA (Szpilman et al., 2007).

Crossing the seas, in the European framework, the city of Paris would have the "Saviors of the Seine" in the 19th century, a professional body in the fight against drowning. Within this framework, the First International Rescue Congress would be held in 1878, organized by Raymond Pitet and under the motto "Saving a life is a duty for all humans and has no borders".

Continuing with his work, Pitet founded the *Fédération Nationale de Sauvetage* in 1889, to be followed in 1891 by the *Royale Life Saving Society* in England with the aim of trying to cut down the number of drownings annually and with the intention of encouraging citizens to know and learn techniques for saving in water (RLSS, 1990). In 1892, the *Instituto de Socorro a Náufragos* in Portugal (ISN, 1992). In 1910 the *International Rescue Congress* was held in Saint Ouen (a city near Paris), during which the "*Fédération Internationale de Sauvetage et Secourisme et de Sports Utilitaires*", based in Paris (67). In 1970 the "*Corps of Canoe Lifeguards*" came into operation on fourteen different beaches in England, in that year they carried out 32 saves (Pomares, 1973). In 2002, the *First World Congress on asphyxia by submersion* was held in the city of Amsterdam (Holland) (Romero, 2007).

In the national framework, Spain in 1907 the *Spanish Society for the Salvage of Shipwrecked* is integrated into the *Spanish Swimming Federation* as the *Aquatic Salvage Section* (Arenillas, 1990). This society was declared of "*Public Utility*" on January 12, 1887, developing a great work that lasted until 1940 (O'Farril, 1971). During 1955 a group of people, coming from swimming, the Red Cross and diving, founded the *National Rescue and Lifeguard Commission* (Arenillas, 1990). Just a few years later, in 1961, the *Spanish Rescue and Lifeguard Federation* was created (Ramírez, 2011). In 1988 the first monographic course on *Aquatic Rescue* was held at the *INEF* in Galicia, included in the curriculum that formed the *Bachelor of Physical Education* and since then it has remained an activity that is held every year (Palacios, 1993). Today, the *Aquatic Activities and Lifeguard Research Group (GIAAS)* stands out, founded in 2004 with Dr. José Palacios Aguilar as its director.

These forementioned events mark a time line of men belonging to all corners of the world, who have pursued for centuries a humanitarian objective such as saving lives in the face of the aquatic environment. The author Eusebio O'Farril (1971) described: "With this humanitarian impulse, rescue and first aid were born and persists, impregnated with altruism and generosity, for whose reasons it is not utopian, discounting its high aims, to call it «the sport of charity»".

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Since the origins of man's creation, water housed a formidable symbolic wealth among civilizations, religions, and beliefs, with multiple "water cultures" found in all parts of the world. In that transcendence is also the Christian religion

with sacramental rites such as baptism, and outstanding stories such as the universal flood next to the Noah's Ark and the passage of the Red Sea where this element is represented in all of them. In the Old Testament with Isaiah (40, 3.5) water was mentioned as a symbol of the Spirit of God and as an allegory of his work. In the period of Jesus Christ, the New Testament, water was known to the people of Israel as a sign of cleanliness (Arévalo, 2004).

Throughout the history of salvation, water has been the symbol that provides life, that purifies, that renews, but also destroys, devastates, causes death and terror (Villa & Ramírez, 2018). These opposite symbolisms, life and death, are represented in the baptism with the new life, since it is raised from the water to be born again. Another meaning of death is the origin of the word baptism that comes from the Greek "baptisma" (act of submerging), the failure in submerging, is the accident called drowning.

Multiple events have been reflected in the history of humanity where man is linked to this element such as the swimmers' cave or the paintings dating from the time of Pompey as a means of wars, commerce and survival, since man has had to keep up with to the environment that surrounds him to survive (Vázquez et al., 2017) and has developed techniques to solve problems forging the origin of water rescue. These problems focused on the loss of life in the aquatic environment due to drowning. In one of the stories told in the Greco-Roman era "The legend of Hero and Leandro" the drowning by both protagonists is present, today it has become a problem of concern worldwide due to the occupation among the former positions as a cause of death (López et al., 2019).

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