

"If you think Maxwell Johnson has already written the definitive book on the history of Christian initiation rites, you are right. But now he has made it better. A revised and expanded edition is only necessary because scholars have new insights into the history of these rites, and because their contemporary celebration continues to develop.

"Johnson has written a textbook case of writing good textbooks: clear in organization, generous in quoting sources, precise in analysis, and provocative in exposing contemporary theological issues. Maxwell Johnson is a mystagogical Titan at the top of his form."

Paul Turner, S.T.D.

Author of *When Other Christians Become Catholic* (Liturgical Press)

"The revised and expanded edition of Maxwell Johnson's *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* further enhances the reputation of the Liturgical Press for publishing first-rate liturgical studies that both keep abreast of the field and ahead of it. The first edition clearly established itself as the best overall treatment of the subject and the most widely used textbook available. This new edition captures the fast-moving developments in scholarship on the rites of both eastern and western Christianity. Particularly instructive is Professor Johnson's discussion of the most recent fruitful engagement of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches on initiation, including directions to be taken in the future. Most arresting, however, is his penetrating theology and spirituality of the rites of initiation. For everyone interested in the rites of Christian initiation, no matter from what faith tradition, this revised and expanded edition is must reading and study."

T. M. Finn

Chancellor Professor of Religion Emeritus
College of William and Mary

"The first edition has already established itself as the standard history of the rites of initiation, and the updating in this second edition will further enhance its reputation."

Rev. Paul Bradshaw, Ph.D.
Professor of Liturgy
University of Notre Dame

"By adopting Maxwell Johnson's *The Rites of Christian Initiation* as the standard text for courses liturgy professors across the English-speaking world have recognized the author as among the premier liturgical scholars. Johnson is especially competent in the early period. The revised version has substantial additions: chapters for both East and West in the ante-Nicene period, including new material on the *Odes of Solomon*; new material on the Cappadocians; a new chapter on all of the seven living Eastern Christian traditions (available nowhere else); the chapter on the modern period now includes the new rites of the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELCA) and *Lutheran Service Book* (Missouri Synod) together with more recent scholarship on the RCIA. This makes it the most up to date and comprehensive book on the rites of initiation."

Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B.
Saint John's Abbey
Collegeville, Minnesota

Maxwell E. Johnson

The Rites of Christian Initiation

Their Evolution and Interpretation
Revised and Expanded Edition

A PUEBLO BOOK

Liturgical Press Collegeville, Minnesota
www.litpress.org

A Pueblo Book published by Liturgical Press

The Scripture quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, Catholic edition, © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Cover design by David Manahan, O.S.B. Illustration of mosaic detail from the Arian Baptistry, Ravenna, Italy. The Art Archive, Dagli Orti.

First edition published under the title *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*. © 1999 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota.

© 2007 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, P.O. Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Johnson, Maxwell E., 1952–

The rites of Christian initiation : their evolution and interpretation / Maxwell E. Johnson. — 2nd, rev. and expanded ed.

p. cm.

“A Pueblo book.”

Includes index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8146-6215-1

1. Initiation rites—Religious aspects—Christianity—history of doctrines. I. Title.

BV873.I54 J64 2007

265'.109—dc22

2007016434

IN MEMORIAM

To the Memory of Aelred Tegels, OSB (d. March 17, 2003),
Monk, Scholar, Teacher, and Friend,
who, with wit and wisdom, was one of the first to introduce me
to liturgical study,
this book is gratefully dedicated

THE BAPTISTERY OF THE LATERAN BASILICA

Here a people of godly race are born for heaven;
the Spirit gives them life in the fertile waters.
The Church-Mother, in these waves, bears her children
like virginal fruit she has conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Hope for the kingdom of heaven, you who are reborn in this spring,
for those who are born but once have no share in the life of blessedness.
Here is to be found the source of life, which washes the whole universe,
which gushed from the wound of Christ.

Sinner, plunge into the sacred fountain to wash away your sin.
The water receives the old man, and in his place makes the new man
to rise.
You wish to become innocent; cleanse yourself in this bath,
whatever your burden may be, Adam's sin or your own.

There is no difference between those who are reborn; they are one,
in a single baptism, a single Spirit, a single faith.
Let none be afraid of the number or the weight of their sins:
those who are born of this stream will be made holy.

(Inscription of Sixtus III, 432–440)¹

¹ Translation is adapted from Lucien Deiss, *Springtime of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1979), 264.

Contents

Acknowledgments x

Abbreviations xii

Preface to the Second Edition xiii

Introduction xvii

Chapter 1: The Origins of the Rites of Christian Initiation 1

Chapter 2: Christian Initiation in the Pre-nicene East 41

Chapter 3: Christian Initiation in the Pre-nicene West 83

Chapter 4: Initiation in the Christian East During the Fourth and
Fifth Centuries 115

Chapter 5: Initiation in the Christian West During the Fourth and
Fifth Centuries 159

Excursus: Baptismal Preparation and the Origins of Lent 201

Chapter 6: Christian Initiation in the Middle Ages 219

Chapter 7: The Rites of Initiation in the Christian East 269

Chapter 8: Christian Initiation in the Protestant and Catholic Reforms
of the Sixteenth Century 309

Chapter 9: Christian Initiation in the Churches Today 375

Chapter 10: Back Home to the Font: The Place of a Baptismal
Spirituality and Its Implications in a Displaced World 451

Index 479

Acknowledgments

Excerpts from the English translation of *Rite of Baptism for Children* © 1969, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL); excerpts from the English translation of *Rite of Confirmation (Second Edition)* © 1975, ICEL; excerpts from the English translation of *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* © 1985, ICEL. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from documents of the Second Vatican Council are from *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P., © 1996 Costello Publishing Company, Inc. Used with permission.

Excerpts from Nathan Mitchell, *Eucharist as Sacrament of Initiation, Forum Essays*, 2 (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, © 1994) Archdiocese of Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 1800 N. Hermitage Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622. 1-800-933-1800. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Extracts from John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels* (London; SPCK, 1971). By permission of John Wilkinson.

Excerpts from Gabriele Winkler, "Baptism 2. Eastern Churches," in Paul F. Bradshaw (ed.), *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy & Worship* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002) and "The Blessing of Water in the Oriental Liturgies," *Concilium* 21 (1985): 53–61. Gabriele Winkler, "The Original Meaning of the Prebaptismal Anointing and Its Implications," *Worship* 52 (1978) in LWSS. By permission of Gabriele Winkler.

Excerpts from Paul Bradshaw, "The Homogenization of Christian Liturgy—Ancient and Modern: Presidential Address," *Studia Liturgica* 26 (1996). Bradshaw, "Baptismal Practice in the Alexandrian Tradition," in *Essays in Early Christian Initiation*, ed. P. Bradshaw (Grove Books, Ltd., 1989) in LWSS. By permission of Paul Bradshaw.

Excerpts from Bryan Spinks, "Luther's Timely Theology of Unilateral Baptism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995). By permission of Bryan Spinks.

Excerpts from "Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed Rites" by J.D.C. Fisher, pp. 155–56, 158, 162, from *Study of Liturgy* edited by Jones, Wainwright, Yarnold, Bradshaw (London: SPCK; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). English

language rights throughout the world excluding the US and Canada by permission of SPCK. English rights throughout North America by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

Excerpts from J.D.C. Fisher, *Baptism in the Medieval West* (1965); J.D.C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: The Reformation Period* (1970); and E.C. Whitaker and Maxwell E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (2003). By permission of SPCK Publishing.

Excerpts from Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," *Studia Liturgica* 19 (1989): 28–46 in LWSS. By permission of Adela Yarbro Collins.

Excerpts from Jean Laporte, "Models from Philo in Origen's Teaching on Original Sin," in LWSS, 113–15. By permission of F. Ellen Weaver.

Excerpts from Eugene Brand, "New Rites of Initiation and Their Implications: in the Lutheran Churches," *Studia Liturgica* 12 (1977): 151–65 in LWSS. By permission of Eugene Brand.

Excerpts from Aidan Kavanagh, "Christian Initiation in Post-Conciliar Catholicism: A Brief Report," *Worship* 65 (1991) in LWSS and "Unfinished and Unbegun Revisited," *Worship* 53 (1979) in LWSS. By permission of St. Meinrad Abbey.

Excerpts from Edward Yarnold, *Awe Inspiring Rites of Initiation* (London: T&T Clark, 1994). By kind permission of Continuum International Publishing Group.

Abbreviations

ACC	Alcuin Club Collections
AIRI	E. Yarnold, <i>The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A.</i> , second edition (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994).
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
DBL	E.C. Whitaker, ed. <i>Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy</i> . ACC 79. Third Edition ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (London: SPCK, 2003).
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
ELW	<i>Evangelical Lutheran Worship</i> (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2006).
FC	<i>Fathers of the Church</i> (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1946–).
LCMS	Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod
LBW	<i>Lutheran Book of Worship</i> (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978).
LW	<i>Luther's Works</i> (Philadelphia/Saint Louis).
LWSS	Maxwell E. Johnson, ed. <i>Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation</i> (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo, 1995).
MFC	Message of the Fathers of the Church
MFC 5	Thomas M. Finn, ed., <i>Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: West and East Syria</i> , Message of the Fathers of the Church 5 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992).
MFC 6	Thomas M. Finn, ed., <i>Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: Italy, North Africa and Egypt</i> , Message of the Fathers of the Church 6 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992).
NPNF	<i>Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
SC	<i>Sources chrétiennes</i>

Preface to the Second Edition

Since its publication in 1999, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, has become a widely used textbook for both graduate and upper-level undergraduate courses at universities, seminaries, and schools of theology throughout the United States and elsewhere, both Catholic and Protestant. While the first edition was hailed as “the best overall treatment of Christian initiation available” (Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B.) and “the standard textbook on the subject for very many years to come” (Paul Bradshaw), the time has come for a revised and expanded edition. Why?

First, many of the English translations of primary texts used in the first edition, especially of patristic and medieval sources and authors, are now out of date and are here brought up to date in conjunction with my own new edition of the standard collection of early and medieval Christian Initiation texts: E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy: Revised and Expanded Edition*.¹ Second, significant developments in liturgical scholarship on Christian initiation, especially in the pre- and immediately post-Nicene contexts, call for some important changes and the occasional nuance of positions I previously took. When preparing the first edition of this study, my work with Paul Bradshaw and L. Edward Phillips on the *Apostolic Tradition*, ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 215 C.E.), was in its preliminary stages. Although our initial conclusions were reflected somewhat in the first edition, the fact that our Hermeneia edition and commentary on that influential text has since appeared² made it essential that the section dealing with the *Apostolic Tradition* be revised accordingly. Similarly, other important—especially early—sources omitted in the first edition are now integrated into this study, as are other scholarly studies on the overall historical context of the time periods involved. Such has meant, for example, that the previous single chapter on the pre-Nicene period has become two,

¹ (London: S.P.C.K., and Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, A Pueblo Book, 2003).

² *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, Hermeneia Series (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

divided by Eastern and Western sources. Similarly, further nuance was certainly needed with regard to the way in which most scholars, including me, have accepted as fact the baptismal theology of Romans 6 as fundamentally “Western” and John 3:5 as fundamentally “Eastern” (i.e., Syrian and Egyptian). My own research since the first edition has led me toward a different conclusion altogether, namely, that the John 3:5 (and Titus 3:5, for that matter) theology of baptism as “new birth in water and the Holy Spirit,” is as “Western” as it is “Eastern,” and that Romans 6, with some exceptions, was rather new to *both* East and West as an overall theology and paradigm in the fourth century. This conclusion certainly has implications for how the patristic materials, as well as the Western medieval sources, are here presented.

Third, there is no question but that after the patristic and Western medieval sources a glaring weakness of the first edition was the minimal attention I gave to the liturgical traditions of the Christian East. To rectify this, an entirely new chapter now treats the seven living liturgical traditions of the Christian East (Armenian, Byzantine, Coptic, Ethiopic, Maronite, East Syrian, and West Syrian), together with the churches (both Orthodox and Catholic) that make up these rites. By doing so, it is intended that this new edition will be more widely useful for Eastern Christians as well and for better attention to the ethnic, racial, and ecclesial diversity of the Christian tradition among Eurocentric Western Christians themselves.

Fourth, in late 2006 both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod (LCMS) published new liturgical resources, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELCA) and *Lutheran Service Book and Agenda* (LCMS). Hence, if this book is to remain useful for the study of some of the major modern Protestant rites in the United States it can no longer treat only those texts produced in the 1970s. Similarly, developments in and studies of Christian initiation for Roman Catholics since 1999, especially with regard to the RCIA and changes in confirmation practice, have also called for some updating.

My intent here is to offer a text that is as up-to-date as possible in order to provide for teachers and students a reliable guide for solid grounding in the classic liturgical and sacramental tradition leading to an informed pastoral practice in the churches today. My method remains strongly historical and theological. For, as Robert Taft has written: “Any ‘theology of initiation’ that is not based on the concrete

historical tradition of baptism is a delusion and a waste of time.”³ Hopefully, this new edition will be neither a delusion nor a waste of time but will move in some direction toward being worthy of the kind and gracious reception that the first edition has received.

³ Robert Taft, “The Structural Analysis of Liturgical Units: An Essay in Methodology,” in *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, ed. Robert Taft (Rome 1997), 191, note 7.

Introduction

The rites of Christian initiation have often been interpreted according to what many in the anthropological and ritual disciplines have identified as “rites of passage.”¹ That is, initiation rites, like those of birth, marriage, entrance into adulthood, specific vocations, and even the funeral and other rites surrounding death, are those rites by which various communities the world over, since the beginning of time, have celebrated as marking important “passages” from one level of identity and status in a given community or group to another. Such rites, generally, have an overall three-part structure and take place over a predetermined period of time.

Rites of separation, in which those to be eventually initiated are separated from the community for a time, take place first. This is usually followed by a period of what is called a time of “liminality” or transition, that is, a period “betwixt and between” the initiands’ former identity and status and their yet-to-be new identity and status. Several different rites, including, for example, instruction in the customs and traditions of the community, may take place during this “liminal period” of isolation and transition. The final stage, of course, is that of the initiation or incorporation itself, in which the initiands now enter completely into the life of the community with a new status and identity as

¹ Some of the classic anthropological studies of these rites include Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965); and V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969). For more recent studies of ritual and initiation see Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Mircea Eliade, *Birth and Rebirth: The Religious Meanings of Initiation in Human Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958); Ronald Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Roy A. Rappaport, *Religion and Ritual in the Making of Humanity: Ritual in the Making of Religious Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Leonell Mitchell’s *The Meaning of Ritual* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977) remains a very helpful and accessible treatment as well. See especially 1–22.

full members of that community. Most often, we are told, this final rite of incorporation includes a sharing in some kind of ritual meal (cf. even graduation receptions, wedding banquets, and funeral lunches). Such a process, often quite dramatic and life-threatening in certain aboriginal societies, is commonly viewed in several different cultural contexts as a ritual process of “rebirth” and/or one of “death and resurrection.” Those initiated have “died” to their former way of life and been “resurrected” or “reborn” in another. Even the newly married couple has gone through a process of “dying” to being single so that they might be “reborn” or “resurrected” as husband and wife and thus take a new place in society.

While there is nothing specifically *Christian* about such a ritual process in general, since early on the Church has made use of a similar process to celebrate the initiation of those who, in response to the proclamation of the gospel, the “good news” of God’s salvation in Christ, have been converted, repented of their sins, and sought incorporation into Christ and the Christian community. The insights of anthropology into what appears to be a rather common human and social process of initiation, then, can be of great help to us in understanding the particular shape of the rites of Christian initiation specifically.

Like all human rites of passage, those Christian rites of initiation themselves will come to follow a general pattern consisting of:

- (1) Entrance to the Catechumenate, a rite of *separation*;
- (2) the Catechumenate and eventual “Election” for initiation, a “liminal” time of *transition* and *preparation*, during which those to be initiated are instructed and formed in the teaching and life of the community;
- (3) the Rites of Initiation (baptism, “confirmation,” and first communion), rites by which the former catechumens and “elect” are now incorporated fully into the life of the Christian community; and
- (4) the Period of Mystagogy (“explanation of the mysteries”), a continued process of further incorporation or reintegration into the community by explaining what the “mysteries” received signify and what their implications are for ongoing life in the community.

And, significantly, these Christian initiation rites are also often interpreted as rites of “rebirth” (see John 3:5) and “death, burial, and resurrection” (see Romans 6).

As helpful as the insights of anthropology and ritual studies are for understanding the particular structure or shape of the rites of Christian initiation, however, they tell us very little about the actual content and theological interpretation of those rites. Similarly, as one of my former teachers, the late Mark Searle, liked to say, *initiation* rites, as they are generally understood, are about initiating people who *already* belong in some way to the community into a new level of membership or status within that same community. *Christian* rites of "initiation," however, are about "conversion" and "faith." They are about entering a *new* community to which one did *not* belong before, even by birth, for Christians, in the words of Tertullian in the early third century, are "made, not born." The anthropological analogy with the "rites of passage," therefore, is only partially true in the case of the Christian rites. The ritual process may be similar but the contents, goal, and interpretation of that process are not necessarily the same and students of liturgy would do well to remember the following statement by Catherine Bell, herself one of the leading experts in the field of what is called ritual studies: "I am struck by the faith liturgical studies has in social science. Why is it so willing to take social scientific expertise at its word and believe that social science really has a clue as to which cultural forms express what?"²

While greatly appreciative of the helpful insights of anthropology and ritual studies, this book is written from the perspective of liturgical texts, history, and theology. Beginning with the New Testament origins of the rites (chapter 1), the next four chapters deal with the further evolution of those rites and related issues within the early churches of the first few centuries: the pre-Nicene period in the Christian East (chapter 2) and Christian West (chapter 3); and the first major period of liturgical change and renewal in the fourth and fifth centuries in the East (chapter 4) and West (chapter 5). Chapter 6 surveys what has been called for the West the dissolution and disintegration of the rites of Christian initiation within the medieval period. Chapter 7 provides an overview of the rites of Christian initiation in the seven living liturgical traditions of the Christian East. Chapter 8 addresses the changes brought about by the Protestant and Catholic Reformations of the sixteenth century. Chapter 9, the longest chapter of this study, surveys the development, current shape, theological interpretations,

² Catherine Bell, "The Authority of Ritual Experts," *Studia Liturgica* 23 (1993): 114.

and contemporary problems surrounding the initiation rites in some of the churches of today. And the concluding chapter (chapter 10), originally published in a somewhat different form,³ suggests several implications of a baptismal spirituality for the churches today.

Aided by what I believe is the best of current liturgical scholarship on the evolution and interpretation of the rites of Christian initiation, several chapters present pertinent selections either from primary liturgical documents or from authors in the period of history under question. In each case, these selections are followed by a descriptive and interpretive analysis of both the rites and theology presented in the particular document or author. Comparative analysis of several documents and/or authors in a particular geographical area or period of history is also provided from time to time as we seek to understand significant developments in the shape of the rites and their theological interpretation.

My approach to the rites of Christian initiation is textual, historical, and theological for a variety of reasons. Thomas Talley has said:

Our current discussions of pastoral praxis, of theological meaning, or spirituality, and of much more rest finally on the assumption that *we know what we are talking about*; and to know what we are talking about demands knowing much more than can be generated by a mere creativity operating upon data drawn only from the experience of itself.⁴

This is especially the case with the rites of Christian initiation. To draw upon data “only from the experience of itself” in Christian initiation is a dangerous methodology for understanding and interpreting those rites. Our own contemporary Western Christian experience of those rites, for example, is often an experience of rites that have been separated from their original unitive core and integral vision into a disjointed ritual process. Such a separated and disjointed ritual process often includes baptism in infancy, first communion at the “age of reason,” and confirmation later in adolescence or early adulthood as a rite of mature faith commitment. Based on our contempo-

³ “Back Home to the Font: Eight Implications of a Baptismal Spirituality,” *Worship* 71, no. 6 (1997), 482–504.

⁴ Cited in Robert Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 2nd revised and enlarged ed. (Rome: Edizioni Orientalia Christiana, 1997), 11–12 (emphasis added).

rary *experience* we might see that process as normative and proper, as the way it is supposed to be. But if we attend to the evolution and interpretation of those rites throughout the history of the church, we cannot but see those rites today as having become disjointed and disconnected from their source. It is, then, not so much our *experience* of the rites that must be primary in all this, but the evolution and interpretation of those rites themselves that are to shape, challenge, and critique our experience. In other words, here it is the Christian liturgical tradition as known from the texts of that tradition that is primary, and our “experience” of the contemporary use or misuse of that tradition that is secondary.

To actually “know what we are talking about” with regard to the rites of Christian initiation, then, means that we have to study history. There is no other way. Robert Taft has said on numerous occasions with regard to liturgy that “those ignorant of history are subject to the latest cliché.” Along similar lines he has written that:

. . . amidst all the contemporary talk of “relevance” in matters liturgical it remains my firm conviction that nothing is so relevant as knowledge, nothing so irrelevant as ignorance. So I think that in matters of pastoral relevance there is still something we can learn from comparative liturgical scholarship across a broad range of traditions. . . . One of the great contemporary illusions is that one can construct a liturgical theology without a profound knowledge of the liturgical tradition. So in spite of the (to me) rather perplexing discomfort that many Americans seem to have with history, there can be no theology without it. . . . Christian liturgy is a given, an object, an already existing reality like English literature. One discovers what English literature is only by reading Chaucer and Shakespeare and Eliot and Shaw and the contemporaries. So too with liturgy. If we want to know what Christmas and Chrismation, Eucharist and Easter mean, we shall not get far by studying anthropology or game-theory, or by asking ourselves what we *think* they mean. We must plunge into the enormous stream of liturgical and patristic evidence and wade through it piece by piece, age by age, ever alert to pick up shifts in the current as each generation reaches for its own understanding of what it is we are about.⁵

The pastoral practice of liturgy itself, I am convinced, must also flow from such a historical and theological approach. Dennis Smolarski

⁵ Ibid., 14.

speaks of the relationship between liturgy and pastoral practice in a way that should be noted carefully by all who are involved in any type of pastoral ministry. Smolarski states:

The noted French liturgical center is called the *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique de Paris*. *Pastorale* is the noun and *Liturgique* is the adjective. In English we speak of *pastoral liturgy*. But the French term implies *liturgical pastoral practice*. The liturgy (and its spirit, its history, etc.) forms and informs pastoral practice. We [Americans] tend to think the other way around. We think pastoral concerns are reasons for changing liturgy. The French phrase suggests that liturgy can affect the ways we minister, that the spirit of the liturgy can direct our work. A person should never have to choose between being pastoral or being liturgical, since good liturgy is ultimately pastoral.⁶

Together with an overall textual, historical, and theological approach, this book is written from an ecumenical perspective as well. While intended primarily for modern Western Christian readers, an ecumenical approach necessitates that the rites of initiation as they developed in the Christian East be given due attention as well. And although my major concern from the medieval period on will be with Western Roman Catholic development and theology, my own ecclesial identity as a Lutheran, who teaches liturgy in a predominantly Roman Catholic setting, makes it personally imperative that adequate attention also be given to the insights of the Protestant Reformers in the sixteenth century and to the current shape of the rites of initiation within at least some of the Protestant traditions today (especially the Lutheran and Anglican traditions) within the limits of a primarily North American context. Such an approach, it is hoped, will make this book useful to a wider ecumenical readership.

Before we begin this “plunge into the enormous stream of liturgical and patristic evidence and wade through it piece by piece, age by age,” I would be remiss if I did not note here my indebtedness to several people. Almost everything I know about the rites of Christian initiation I learned from two great liturgical scholars: Professor Gabriele Winkler, recently retired as the Chair of *Liturgiewissenschaft* (Comparative Liturgiology) at the University of Tübingen, Germany; and Professor Paul Bradshaw, Professor of Liturgy at the University of Notre

⁶ *Sacred Mysteries: Sacramental Principles and Liturgical Practice* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), 165.

Dame, currently serving as director of Notre Dame's College of Arts and Letters London Program. As a beginning masters-level student in the School of Theology, Saint John's University in 1981, it was through Professor Winkler's rites of initiation class that I was introduced by her both to the serious liturgical study of Christian initiation and to the riches of the Christian East, most notably to those of the early Syrian and Armenian traditions. Seven years later, it was in a 1988 doctoral seminar on Christian initiation in the early church, under the leadership of Professor Bradshaw, my doctoral dissertation director, that I developed a special interest in the early liturgical traditions of Jerusalem and Egypt, leading, ultimately, to a dissertation on a fourth-century Egyptian liturgical document.⁷ Indeed, the first time I ever taught a course in the rites of Christian initiation, now almost twenty years ago, Professor Bradshaw graciously made available for my use his own lecture notes from a similar course. Not surprisingly, then, in especially chapters 1–5 of this study, frequent references are made to the significant writings of both Winkler and Bradshaw. Of course, any use and interpretations I make of their work and contributions, as well as the work of others, remain my own responsibility.

I should also like to acknowledge here several people who have been of immense assistance in the preparation of this book: to my colleague Paul Bradshaw for his invaluable comments and suggestions on the first five chapters; to Stefanos Alexopoulos and M. Daniel Findikyan, colleagues in *Das Institut*, for their critical read of and suggestions for chapter 7; to my colleague Michael Driscoll for his similar assistance with Chapter 6; to Sister Linda Gaupin of the Diocese of Orlando, Florida, for graciously making available to me several often-ignored, French articles on the development of Christian initiation between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe; to my graduate assistants Annie Vorhes and Melanie Ross for help in research, proofreading, and in the compilation of the index; and to Peter Dwyer and Liturgical Press, for their willingness to undertake this new edition and see it through to its publication under the Pueblo imprint. To all of these I owe an enormous debt of gratitude.

Finally, this edition is dedicated now *in memoriam* of Father Aelred Tegels, O.S.B. (d. 2003), of Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN. I am

⁷ *The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis: A Literary, Liturgical, and Theological Analysis*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 249 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1995).

one of several people working in some facet of liturgy today who cut their liturgical eye teeth in one of Father Aelred's many introductory graduate-level classes in liturgy at a variety of American universities called by the foreboding title, "Introduction to Liturgiology." These classes always demonstrated his solid grasp of the liturgical sources and ecumenical scholarship of both East and West in several ancient and modern languages, were spiced with his wonderful and dry sense of humor, and always had an eye oriented to various pastoral implications and applications. By dedicating this book to his memory I wish to express publicly, in this small way, my personal gratitude for his many years of scholarship and teaching. *Requiescat in pace.*

Chapter 1

The Origins of the Rites of Christian Initiation

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:16-20)

Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:14-16)

On the basis of these two biblical texts, it would seem that the origins of the rites of Christian initiation are rather clear and obvious. What the churches continue to do today in their initiatory rites has its origins in the explicit command of the risen Jesus, who in his great missionary commissioning of the church, directed his followers to continue a process of evangelization, of making disciples and teaching (catechesis), and of baptizing.

Modern New Testament scholarship on the life and ministry of Jesus, however, urges considerable caution at this point. It is a consensus of contemporary scholars that the above cited passage from Mark's Gospel was not part of Mark's original text, which probably ended at 16:8, but was added at a later point to harmonize with the post-resurrection accounts appearing in the other gospels.¹ Considerable doubt has also

¹ Cf. Morna Dorothy Hooker, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentaries 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 43-48.

been raised about the reliability of the precise details in the passage from Matthew 28:16-20. In particular, it is difficult here to reconcile the formulaic-sounding language of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” and the special missionary focus on “all nations” with the historical Jesus himself. Since both this type of early trinitarian language and the shift in emphasis from a predominantly Jewish to an almost exclusively Gentile mission seem to reflect later development in the life of the primitive church, Matthew 28:16-20 is probably not a source for what *Jesus* actually said but represents, rather, the catechetical and liturgical practice of Matthew’s own community in the late 80s placed on the lips of Jesus and how that community understood its missionary and evangelical responsibilities.² Indeed, if Jesus himself actually commanded baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” it would be quite difficult to understand the numerous references throughout the book of Acts to baptism simply “in the name of Jesus” (cf. Acts 2:38) with no indications of such trinitarian language whatsoever.

If the historical reliability of these two texts, which attribute Christian initiation to an explicit dominical command, is questionable, what, then, can we know with some degree of certainty about the origins of these rites from the New Testament? The intent of this chapter is to provide an answer to that question. It will proceed by looking first at Jesus’ own meal practices, his “table companionship” with others, as a means of initiating or incorporating people into a special relationship with himself. Second, since the New Testament itself provides several references to Jesus’ own baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptizer, careful attention must be given both to the origins of John’s own baptismal practice and to the significance of Jesus’ baptism for the ongoing practice and theological interpretation of specifically *Christian* initiation rites. Finally, a survey of the various discernible practices and interpretations of Christian initiation throughout the remainder of the New Testament will be provided. What will become clear is that there is not—even within the New Testament itself—only *one* ritual pattern for the initiation of Christian converts that might be regarded as universally “normative.” Rather, from its very origins, Christian liturgical practice reflects considerable variety and multiplicity both in its ritual patterns and in its differing theological inter-

² On all this see George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 77–92.

pretations. Nowhere is that diversity and multiplicity of origins more true than in the rites of Christian initiation themselves.

JESUS' "TABLE COMPANIONSHIP" AS AN INITIATION RITE

Contemporary biblical scholarship on the life and ministry of Jesus, especially that of the late Norman Perrin, teaches us that Jesus' own table companionship with "tax collectors and sinners" was "the aspect of Jesus' ministry which must have been most meaningful to his followers and most offensive to his critics."³ But why was this so? As Nathan Mitchell has written:

[Jesus] sat at table not as the charming, congenial, ringleted centerpiece of a Rembrandt painting, but as a vulnerable vagrant willing to share potluck with a household of strangers. Normally, a table's prime function is to establish social ranking and hierarchy (by what one eats, how one eats, with whom one eats). Normally, a meal is about social identification, status, and power . . . But the very *randomness* of Jesus' table habits challenged this system of social relations modeled on meals and manners. . . . It was not simply that Jesus ate with objectionable persons—outcasts and sinners—but that he ate with anyone, indiscriminately. Hence his reputation: He has no honor! He has no shame! . . . [Such] commensality was "a strategy for building or rebuilding peasant community on radically different principles from those of honor and shame, patronage and clientage." For Jesus, *healing* (the gift he brings to a home) calls forth *hospitality* (those healed offer refreshment, food and drink, a place at table). . . . The table companionship practiced by Jesus thus recreated the world, redrew all of society's maps and flow charts. Instead of symbolizing social rank and order, it blurred the distinctions between hosts and guests, need and plenty. Instead of reinforcing rules of etiquette, it subverted them, making the last first and the first last.⁴

No wonder Jesus was such a threat to religion, culture, and society alike. Such "table habits," if not watched closely and even curtailed by those in authority, had the potential to transform the world, to subvert the status quo. For this egalitarian, inclusive, challenging, status and

³ Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1976), 102.

⁴ Nathan Mitchell, *Eucharist as Sacrament of Initiation, Forum Essays*, 2 (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), 89–90.

role-reversing “table companionship” was nothing other than the concrete sign, prophetic enactment, and very embodiment of the reign of God that Jesus himself proclaimed and for which he was ultimately crucified, the messianic banquet of the end times (see Isa 25), here anticipated, but already joyfully present, in table sharing with the one whom critics were to label both “drunkard and glutton” (Matt 11:19).

What Perrin calls further this “central feature of the ministry of Jesus”⁵ remained a primary characteristic of the earliest Christian communities as well, a characteristic witnessed to in the post-resurrection accounts of the gospels, which closely associate meals with Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances (cf. Luke 24), in Acts (cf. 2:42, 46), in the New Testament letters (cf. especially 1 Cor 10–11), and in the *Didache* (9, 10, and 14). Indeed, according to Willi Rordorf, it is the continuation of this joyful table companionship with the crucified, yet risen, Jesus on the first day of the week, called now by the term “Lord’s Supper,” that eventually led to the renaming of this day itself as the “Lord’s Day.”⁶ Perrin writes:

In all probability, it was the vividness of the memory of that pre-Easter fellowship between the disciples and the earthly Jesus that provided the pattern for the development of that remarkable sense of fellowship between the early Christians and the risen Lord which is such a feature of primitive Christianity—and which has had such an effect on the Jesus tradition. At all events, we are justified in seeing this table-fellowship as the central feature of the ministry of Jesus; an anticipatory sitting at table in the Kingdom of God and very real celebration of present joy and challenge. Here a great deal of the private teaching of Jesus to his disciples must have had its *Sitz im Leben*—especially the Lord’s Prayer must belong here—and here the disciples must have come to know the

⁵ Perrin, 107. This is not to say, of course, that the Last Supper of Jesus and the twelve is somehow less definitive of the Eucharist than Jesus’ other meal practices. It must not be overlooked, however, that the Last Supper accounts themselves reflect the way in which the early Christians came to understand the significance of the continuation of Jesus’ meal companionship among them in a post-Easter context. In other words, rather than giving us a reliable picture of the meal held on the “night he was betrayed,” these accounts reflect the liturgical and catechetical traditions of the various Christian communities. On the theological and liturgical nature of these accounts cf. Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy* (New York: Pueblo, 1982), 10–43; and Paul Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–23.

⁶ See Willy Rordorf, *Sunday* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968).

special way that Jesus had of “breaking bread” which gave rise to the legend of the Emmaus road (Luke 24:35).⁷

In reference to the continued meal practices of these earliest Christian communities, Nathan Mitchell also notes that:

Many of the practices and beliefs we modern Christians take for granted were not so obvious to the earliest generations of believers. Among these was the ticklish question of whether Jewish and Gentile Christians could sit down together at the same table. (For many Jews, eating with Gentiles would have meant breaking God’s law and becoming unclean.) Was eucharistic dining destined to be a *barrier* separating persons along racial and ethnic lines, or would it become a *bridge* bringing them together? Underlying this question were even more basic questions: Should the Christian community be a closed one, or one that is multicultural, multi-ethnic and racially diverse? Are the disciples of Jesus radically exclusive or inclusive? . . . Christians such as the evangelist Mark came down strongly on the side of *inclusivity*, and they structured their reports of Jesus’ meals to support this point of view. In so doing, Mark redefined discipleship and holiness in terms of food. Becoming a disciple, participating in the new kind of holiness envisioned by Jesus, meant taking part in an inclusive table fellowship. It entailed a revolutionary (and highly controversial) understanding of social status and hierarchy. It meant associating with—and offering the reign (presence) of God to—persons who, by the normal standards of Judaism, were wicked. The primary personal and social virtue sought among the members of this newly emergent, culturally / racially / ethnically diversified community was to be *diakonia*, service at table, the work of a slave.⁸

Regarding “initiation” into such a diverse and inclusive “table companionship” in the historical ministry of Jesus, it is important to underscore the fact that nowhere do the gospels record anything specific about rites of entrance or preparation for this meal sharing with Jesus. Rather, to use our own now traditional sacramental language, the meal itself was not the *culmination* of initiation but appears rather as the *inception*, the very *beginnings* of initiation, the “sacrament” of initiation, if you will, *the* rite of incorporation into Christ. Nothing, not even baptism, and certainly nothing like confirmation, was required

⁷ Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, 107–8.

⁸ Mitchell, *Eucharist as Sacrament of Initiation*, 99–100.

as preparatory steps. Entrance to the meal of God's reign, anticipated and incarnated in the very life, ministry, and meals of Jesus of Nazareth was granted by Jesus himself and granted especially to those who were *not* prepared and *not* (yet) converted, to the godless and undeserving, to the impure, and the unworthy. Conversion itself, it appears, was not a pre-requisite for but a *consequence* of this encounter with Jesus at table. Indeed, one does not earn the labels of "drunkard and glutton," or "friend of tax collectors and sinners" when following prescribed social, religious, or ritual behavior. One earns such labels only by scandalizing the expectations and suppositions of others.

While, thanks to a recent study by Andrew McGowan, one must be *very* cautious about basing current sacramental and liturgical practice on a reconstruction of what the historical Jesus may or may not have done,⁹ especially since the communities that have preserved the meal stories of Jesus are not continuing the same sort of emphasis, one thing, at least, should be quite clear: Eucharist and church, table companionship and community, meals and discipleship, Mass, mission, and ministry, go together. Indeed, the church into which we are initiated, by whatever means, is, essentially composed of the table companions of Jesus, the community of Jesus' disciples and servants, whose identity is celebrated and continually constituted at the church's banquet table. Indeed, initiation into Christ and the church—at whatever age and at whatever level of preparation and understanding—is nothing other than initiation into Jesus' table companionship. Such is certainly the theological understanding behind the introductory statement in the Roman Catholic *Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults* that in the Eucharist "the newly baptized reach the culminating point in their Christian initiation" (no. 217).¹⁰ And such is certainly behind the statement of Aidan Kavanagh that: "in baptism the eucharist

⁹ See Andrew McGowan, "The Meals of Jesus and the Meals of the Church: Eucharistic Origins and Admission to Communion," in Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips, eds., *Studia Liturgica Diversa: Essays in Honor of Paul F. Bradshaw* (Portland: The Pastoral Press, 2004), 101–16. For somewhat contrary views to McGowan see Thomas O'Loughlin, "The Eucharist as 'The Meal That Should Be,'" *Worship* 80, no.1 (2006): 30–44; and Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 64–65.

¹⁰ *Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

begins, and in the eucharist baptism is sustained. From this premier sacramental union flows all the church's life."¹¹

Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that while the meal and table companionship after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension did remain distinguishing characteristics of the Christian community (cf. Acts 2:42), a community that came even to place the banquet table at the architectural center of its assembly places, rites called either *baptisma* (baptism, immersion, or dipping) or *loutron* (bath or washing) came almost immediately to serve as the means of initiation into this community. As early as the first post-resurrection Pentecost, Luke describes the following baptismal event:

Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." . . . So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. (Acts 2:38-39, 41)

The use of such a baptismal or washing ritual as a means of incorporating converts into the newly emerging and developing Christian communities, of course, parallels closely the "baptism of repentance" (Mark 1:4) proclaimed and administered by John the Baptizer at the Jordan River. To this "Johannine" baptism Jesus submitted himself at the beginning of his public ministry and it is this event which provided the foundation and paradigm for the development of specifically *Christian* practices of baptismal initiation. It is to this baptismal rite of John and to the significant event of Jesus' own baptism that we now turn.

JESUS AND BAPTISM

The Baptism of John

That Jesus was baptized by John the Baptizer at the Jordan is asserted or implied in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, each in its own distinct manner: Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 3:13-17; and Luke 3:21-22. But before dealing with this event and its significance, a prior question needs to be addressed. From where did the baptismal practice of John originate? For this question there is not one clear or certain answer and several theories have been suggested as possibilities. Traditional

¹¹ Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism* (New York: Pueblo, 1978), 122.

scholarship has tended toward seeing the origins of John's own practice as stemming either from what was considered to be parallel Jewish "baptismal" rituals performed among the Essene community at Qumran near the Dead Sea or from the tradition of Jewish "proselyte" baptism as an initiatory rite for Gentile converts to Judaism.

Among the Essenes, a first-century quasi-monastic Jewish community that had withdrawn to the desert to live lives of purity in preparation and eschatological expectation for the coming day of the Lord, and whose ritual practices are known to us both from that body of writings called *The Dead Sea Scrolls* and from references in the writings of the pro-Roman, Jewish historian Josephus, it is certainly clear that ritual washings, immersions, or ritual baths were a common practice.¹² Some scholars have not only seen in these ritual washings a close parallel to John's practice but—because John's own lifestyle was so clearly ascetic itself (see Mark 1:6) and his baptismal proclamation also related to a withdrawal into the desert to prepare the way of the Lord (see Mark 1:2-3)—have gone so far as to suggest that John himself may have been a member of this community.¹³

According to Adela Yarbro Collins, however, the dissimilarities between John's baptismal practice and the washings of the Qumran community are as great as the similarities. That is, while John's baptism appears to be a once-for-all time ritual of repentance, those washings or immersions at Qumran were repeatable daily washings related to Levitical or ritual purity. In other words, the Essene ritual baths did not constitute an *initiation* into that community but were an ongoing means of maintaining ritual purity for the members of that community. Similarly, the Qumran immersions appear to have been self-administered, while that of John was administered by him to those who received it. And, while the community at Qumran was a withdrawn and exclusive community, John the Baptizer not only appeared

¹² For specific references to the Dead Sea Scrolls and the writings of Josephus, see Gordon Lathrop, "Baptism in the New Testament and its Cultural Settings," in S. Anita Stauffer, ed., *Worship and Culture in Dialogue* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994), 25–26. On the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Essenes in general see James C. Vanderkam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 71–120.

¹³ J.A.T. Robinson, "The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community," in *Twelve New Testament Studies* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 11–17. For a review of this hypothesis, see Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 41–43.

and baptized in public, but his prophetic message of repentance was directed inclusively to all who heard him.¹⁴

Furthermore, whatever similarities there may be between the ritual practices of John and the Essenes, Collins adds that such similarities are certainly not unique to them.¹⁵ Rather, in the context of first-century Judaism there are numerous examples of the use of water for the practice of ritual washing and/or bathing. Gordon Lathrop has recently summarized this context, saying that:

. . . ancient Jewish and Christian sources of at least the second century list a variety of groups who seem to be identified by their accent on repeated and central washings: the daily baptizers, the Masbotheans, the Sabaeans, the Banaim, the morning bathers. Two ancient texts [i.e., the *Sybilline Oracles* 4:65 and the *Life of Adam and Eve* 6–11], recently identified as most likely Jewish first-century writings, give central importance to full-body washing in a river. And some scholars believe the root baptizing traditions of the much later Mandeans of Mesopotamia must be traced to the Transjordan during the time of the origins of Christianity. . . . New Testament texts . . . point to washing traditions among the Pharisees (Mark 7:3–4) and Jewish purification rites requiring a large amount of water in stone jars (120–180 gallons; John 2:6). What is more, archeological evidence also points toward a considerable interest in bathing at about this time. Cisterns with stairways that seem to be designed for full-body bathing and that utilize, at least in part, an unbroken access to fresh rainwater, are found in considerable numbers at Jerusalem, Jericho, Herodium, Masadah, and at Qumran itself as well as elsewhere.¹⁶

It has thus become very difficult to maintain the position that a particular cause and effect relationship exists between the ritual water practices of the Essenes and the baptismal rite of John.

As noted above, along with the attempt to see the origins of John's baptism among the Essenes, scholars have also sought those origins in the Jewish practice of "proselyte" or convert baptism. But here again there is little certain or solid evidence for such a causal connection or relationship. While Jewish proselyte baptism is similar to that of John's in that it was a once-for-all ritual administered to someone *by* another and

¹⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," in LWSS, 40–41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶ Lathrop, "Baptism in the New Testament and its Cultural Settings," 27–28.

signified a type of inner conversion or transformation (i.e., repentance), explicit documentary evidence for such a practice is actually too late (late first- or early second-century at the earliest) to conclude with any degree of certainty that John derived his own practice from it.¹⁷ Aidan Kavanagh, therefore, is undoubtedly correct when he writes that:

On the matter of practice, New Testament evidence linking Christian baptism to proselyte baptism is not only lacking, but what evidence there is points instead toward Jesus' own baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan as the prototype of Christian practice. In the scriptural accounts of the Baptist's teaching, there is no hint of a death-resurrection theme, no initiatory motif, and no trace of proselyte baptism's admission of a convert to the sacrificial cult of Israel. John's emphases dwell rather upon prophetic expectations of the divine cleansing to be consummated by the work of the promised Messiah in a time of greatly heightened eschatological hope. John's baptism of repentance is preparatory for the messianic work. It is not a means for making gentiles Jews, as was proselyte baptism, nor is it wholly bounded by the bathing ablutions of the Essene ascetics at Qumran. It is its own distinctive thing, subsequently viewed by New Testament authors as the opening of a new order of things without actually being included in it. John's baptism is in water: it will give way to another baptism by One who will baptize with Holy Spirit and with a judgment finer than fire.¹⁸

In other words, rather than seeing John's baptismal practice as having been derived from a specific Jewish type, it is more likely the case that both Jewish proselyte baptism and the baptism of John are parallel developments stemming from a common source or context. Indeed, recent studies underscore that Jewish and early Christian worship, indeed, Judaism and early Christianity themselves, both are responses to the changing social and cultural contexts of the late-first and early-second centuries, especially after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70.¹⁹

¹⁷ For the various theories related to the practice and meaning of Jewish proselyte baptism see Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," 41–46.

¹⁸ Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 10.

¹⁹ On the notion that the relationship between Judaism and early Christianity was not one of parent-child but, rather, that of two children from the same family growing up in increasing estrangement from each other, see Paul Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 29–30; and more recently, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, "Two Issues in the

If neither the Essene ritual washings nor Jewish proselyte baptism are the actual source for John's baptismal practice from where, then, does it ultimately derive? Given that overall first-century context of the increasing ritual use of water for various purifications within Judaism, noted above by Collins and Lathrop, the presence of a charismatic and prophetic "baptizer" like John is probably not all that surprising. Kavanagh's comment that "John's emphases dwell . . . upon prophetic expectations of the divine cleansing to be consummated by the work of the promised Messiah in a time of greatly heightened eschatological hope," together with a number of Old Testament prophetic texts that speak of God's new creation and restoration as beginning with a divine washing away of sin (e.g., Isa 1:16-17 and Ezek 36:25-28), suggests that John's "baptism of repentance" was a ritually enacted prophetic sign that anticipated the very coming of God in human history and the ultimate cleansing with water which would inaugurate the new creation of God itself.²⁰ This was no repeatable immersion of ritual or cultic purity. Nor was John's baptism a way to make Jewish converts out of Gentiles. What John proclaimed, anticipated, and ritually enacted, in typical prophetic fashion, was the dawning of God's decisive intervention in history, the beginning of God's cleansing, restoration, and transformation of God's people. Even the specific Jordan River location for John's baptismal practice is significant in this regard. The Jordan River itself was "ritually unclean," and so hardly fitting for a rite of Jewish "purification."²¹ Rather, its significance lies in its historical connotations for Israel. For, just as centuries before Israel had entered the promised land of Canaan by a dramatic crossing of the Jordan River under Joshua's leadership (see Josh 3-5), so now, at the dawn of a new age, it is precisely to the necessity of a new Jordan

interaction of Jewish and Christian Liturgy: Christian Festivals in *Toldot Yeshu* and the Impact of *Yom Kippur* on the Ember Days," unpublished paper.

²⁰ See Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," 46-47. See also Craig A. Evans, "The Baptism of John in a Typological Context," in Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, eds., *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 34 (London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 45-71.

²¹ See Werner George Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament According to Its Major Witnesses: Jesus – Paul – John*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), 29.

experience as a (trans)formative event that John points.²² Although undoubtedly influenced by the watery and eschatologically expectant context of his own day, it becomes increasingly possible to assert that John's own baptismal practice was not directly dependent upon any other previously known rituals at all. Instead, the baptismal rite at the Jordan to which Jesus himself submits may have been a practice that originated with John the Baptizer himself.

The Baptism of Jesus at the Jordan

The gospel narratives of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, as especially Mark's version makes clear (Mark 1:1-11), all begin with Jesus' own baptism by John at the Jordan. While both Matthew and Luke preface their narration of this event with distinct infancy (Matt 1-2; Luke 1-2:20) and childhood (Luke 2:21ff.) accounts, and John begins his version with the hymnic prologue about the eternal Word becoming flesh (John 1:1-18), these are but prolegomena that anticipate events to occur only later in the context of Jesus' death and resurrection and serve here to set the stage for the actual beginning of the "Gospel" at the Jordan.²³ In the book of Acts Luke himself points to Jesus' baptism by John as this "beginning," when, to Cornelius and others gathered in Caesarea, the Apostle Peter says :

You know the message he [God] sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, *beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced*: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (Acts 10:36-38, [emphasis added])

Within the narration of the event of Jesus' baptism in the Synoptic Gospels, however, it is clear that Matthew, Mark, and Luke each has his own distinctive emphases and points of view. As a careful reading of the following parallel texts from these Synoptic accounts helps to demonstrate, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are not simply narrating an

²² See Lathrop, "Baptism in the New Testament and its Cultural Settings," 30-31.

²³ On the role and interpretation of the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke see Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977). For a shorter version see Raymond Brown, *An Adult Christ at Christmas* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1978).

event in the life of Jesus but are interpreting this event and its theological meaning for their own respective communities.

Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Mark 1:9-11

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Luke 3:21-22

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

That Jesus was, indeed, baptized by John the Baptizer in the Jordan River at the beginning of his public ministry is one of those few events in the life of the historical Jesus of Nazareth on which modern New Testament scholars tend to agree. Whatever other specific historical details of Jesus' life and teaching(s) may be uncertain or questionable, scholars are at a consensus in asserting that Jesus' baptism by John is a

historical fact.²⁴ Not only is there multiple attestation to it in the New Testament (i.e., the Synoptic Gospels, John, and Acts), but the fact that such an event would have been quite embarrassing to the primitive Christian communities for a couple of reasons adds to its historical credibility. First, Jesus' submission to John's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" would challenge the early Christological claim that Jesus was one who "knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21) and was "without sin" (Heb 4:15). Second, and more importantly, to have Jesus submit to John the Baptizer in this way would seem to imply a certain subordination of Jesus to John himself. That is, it would tend to make Jesus of Nazareth a disciple or follower of John. That, in spite of these potential problems of casting doubt on Jesus' sinlessness and implying his subordination to John, the gospel writers were obviously compelled to narrate the event of Jesus' baptism speaks highly in favor of its historicity. If Jesus' baptism had not happened, there would have been no reason whatsoever for the New Testament writers to include references to it. In fact, it would have been easier for their portrayal of Jesus had such an event *not* taken place.

The problem of this relationship between Jesus and John the Baptizer is reflected in the Synoptic accounts themselves. While Mark simply tells the story of Jesus' baptism, both Matthew and Luke add what can only be considered as further theological reflection upon that story. Matthew, for example, handles the apparent problem of Jesus' subordination to John by introducing here a dialogue between them about who should be baptizing whom and resolves any ongoing tension about whether John or Jesus is the greater of the two by asserting that Jesus' baptism is "proper . . . in this way to fulfill all righteousness." For his part, Luke deals with this issue by conveniently having John the Baptizer already arrested by Herod and placed in prison (Luke 3:20) before describing Jesus' baptism itself. From the way in which Luke shapes his account, the reader could be left wondering whether it was actually John—or someone else—who baptized Jesus. Whatever the precise relationship between Jesus and John the Baptizer may have been historically, it is certainly the point of the New Testament narratives of Jesus' baptism, as well as other texts treating the preaching and practice of John (i.e., Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; and

²⁴ On this see Kilian McDonnell, "Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), 209; and Kilian McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996).

Luke 3:1-20), to emphasize John's subservient role as "forerunner" vis-à-vis Jesus. In this way, although there is no denying that Jesus, indeed, was baptized by John, this "messenger," who is the greatest of those "born of women" (Matthew 11:11), is not the Messiah himself (Luke 3:15; John 1:25) but merely the one sent to prepare the way for the Messiah's arrival in history.

To say that Jesus' baptism by John at the Jordan was a historical event is not to say that the gospel accounts of this event constitute an objective record of what actually took place. Rather, the evangelists have painted here a rather biased theological portrait, which reflects their own Easter faith in the identity of the crucified and risen Christ. It is from this faith perspective that the evangelists proclaim this identity of Christ, the beloved Son of God, as revealed now already at the Jordan and, hence, draw attention to the significance of this event for Christian faith, life, and practice.

The theological key to the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' baptism is the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him, whether "like a dove" or "in bodily form like a dove," and the message of the divine voice which identifies him as God's Beloved Son. New Testament scholars such as Oscar Cullman,²⁵ Joachim Jeremias,²⁶ and others have long noted that the message proclaimed at this event—"You are [this is] my Son, the Beloved; with you [with whom] I am well pleased"—is a combination of two important Old Testament texts related to the identity and coronation of kings in ancient Israel (Psa 2:7) and to the identity and vocation of that one known as the "Suffering Servant" in the songs or poems of that sixth-century B.C.E. prophet called Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 42: 1). Psalm 2:7 reads, "You are my son; today I have begotten you," and Isaiah 42:1 states, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights." By combining these two texts, one which deals with the king (i.e., the "messiah," or "anointed one" in Hebrew; "christos," or "Christ" in Greek), and another that deals with this servant of God, who as Deutero-Isaiah makes clear, will be "wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities" (Isa 53:5), the divine voice at Jesus' baptism proclaims

²⁵ See Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, revised edition, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A.M. Hall (Philadelphia; Westminster Press, 1963), 51–82.

²⁶ See Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 43–55.

Jesus' identity not as a glorious and powerful Messiah, who comes in wrath, fire, and judgment, as John the Baptizer had proclaimed, but, rather, as a "suffering Messiah," the "suffering servant," who will "give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In this way, then, scholars have seen this baptismal event at the Jordan as having "vocational" significance for Jesus' own life and ministry. From this point on, the gospel accounts narrate the unfolding story of Jesus as one, which leads, inescapably, to his cross. For this end he had been baptized, toward this end he had begun his journey at the Jordan, and to follow him as his disciple means a sharing in his baptism and cross as well (see Mark 10:38).

That the Holy Spirit should be associated so clearly with this Jordan event is also significant. John the Baptizer had proclaimed, "I baptize you with water for repentance . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). And here in Jesus' own baptism *is* that Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is the presence and gift of this Holy Spirit that distinguishes Jesus' own and subsequent Christian baptism from that of John. The Synoptic accounts of Jesus' baptism, then, are not simply about what happened to Jesus at the Jordan River. They are about what happens in *Christian* baptism, in general, namely, the very gift of the Holy Spirit inseparably associated with that baptism, who therein brings about the new birth of God's beloved "sons and daughters," in whom God is well pleased. Again, as the apostle Peter said in his baptismal invitation on the first Pentecost, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

This focus on baptismal birth by the Holy Spirit is made even more explicit in a textual variant to Luke 3:22 in a number of good Greek manuscripts of Luke's Gospel. While scholars generally prefer the above-noted reading of Luke 3:22, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," the variant reading consists of the direct citation of Psalm 2:7, "You are my son; / today I have begotten you." Given the strong manuscript support for this, it is quite possible that this textual variant was the original Lucan reading which later copyists changed in order to harmonize Luke's account with those of Matthew and Mark and, more importantly, to avoid the possibility of suggesting either that Jesus was adopted by God or somehow only "became" God's Son at the Jordan. Nevertheless, in a mid-second century gospel harmony called the *Diatessaron*, written by the Syrian

Christian Apologist Tatian,²⁷ Psalm 2:7 is quoted as the content of the message of the divine voice at Jesus' baptism. Similarly, while John the Baptizer's preaching had referred to Jesus' baptizing with "the Holy Spirit and fire," the *Diatessaron* refers to fire blazing in the Jordan itself when Jesus was baptized. Until the fifth century, when it was replaced by the four gospels themselves, the *Diatessaron* of Tatian was the standard text of the gospels within Syriac-speaking Christianity. It should be no surprise, then, as we shall see in the next chapter,²⁸ that in the early Syrian Christian tradition not only is Christian initiation understood as a pneumatic (i.e., Holy Spirit oriented) "new birth" rite in imitation of Jesus' own baptismal "birth" in the Jordan, but Psalm 2:7 plays an important role as an interpretative key for understanding the theology of this rite. And, it will be noted, the presence of fire, a powerful biblical image of the divine presence, also makes its appearance in an initiation context within early liturgical texts from this Syrian tradition.

Jesus and Baptism in the Fourth Gospel

The significance of the Synoptic portrayal of Jesus' baptism and its influence on the development of the rites of Christian initiation within early Christianity cannot be overemphasized. To this, however, must be joined the equally important witness of the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John. Like Matthew and Luke, the author of the Fourth Gospel also treats the relationship between John the Baptizer and Jesus in a unique manner. But unlike the Synoptic Gospels, except possibly Luke, in which John the Baptizer baptizes Jesus and John is arrested and imprisoned before the public ministry of Jesus begins, the Fourth Gospel nowhere indicates that Jesus is baptized at all and has the ministry of both John and Jesus taking place at the same time (see John 3:22-23). That Jesus came to John at the Jordan is noted (John 1:28-29), but, instead of describing his baptism, the following is reported:

The next day he [John] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to

²⁷ For a text of Tatian's *Diatesseron* see ANF, vol. 10, 43-129.

²⁸ See below, chapter 2, 42-63.

Israel.” And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:29-30)

As in the Synoptic Gospels, the Fourth Gospel also presents John the Baptizer as subordinated to Jesus and uses this Jordan event to underscore both the coming of the Holy Spirit to Jesus and, now through John the Baptizer’s own testimony, rather than by means of a divine voice, Jesus’ identity as suffering servant (i.e., sacrificial “lamb”) and Son of God. But by not narrating the event of Jesus’ baptism itself there is no way in the Fourth Gospel in which Jesus can appear to play a subordinate role to John the Baptizer at all. Rather, from the very beginning of this gospel, John the Baptizer, who is clearly neither the Messiah, Elijah, nor a prophet (John 1:19-21), is completely subordinated to Jesus as the one whose purpose it is to testify to the true light of the world (John 1:6-9).

What is even more intriguing in this Fourth Gospel is that, three times (!), Jesus himself is reported to have baptized others as part of his public ministry:

After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. (John 3:22)

They [John’s disciples] came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” (John 3:26)

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John”—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and started back to Galilee. (John 4:1-3)

Since the qualifying phrase in John 4:2—“although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized”—is generally regarded by New Testament scholars as a later addition to the text of the Fourth Gospel,²⁹ the possibility is raised here that these references to Jesus’

²⁹ See Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 164–65.

own baptizing practice may actually reflect a historical reminiscence. That is, like John the Baptizer himself, the historical Jesus of Nazareth may once have been a “baptizer” as well. Adela Yarbro Collins has drawn attention to this possibility, saying it is probable that:

. . . the gospel of John is more accurate than the Synoptics on this point, because there is no plausible theological reason why the tradition that Jesus and his disciples once baptized would be invented. The practice of Christian baptism did not need such support. If there were followers of the Baptist around who rivaled the Christians for whom the gospel was written, the information that Jesus had imitated John would provide them with ammunition against the independence and authority of Jesus. A further argument in favour of . . . reliability . . . is that the report of Jesus’ baptizing creates a problem for the evangelist. In 1:33 Jesus was presented as the one who baptizes with holy spirit. But the description in chapters 3–4 does not imply that Jesus’ baptism was different in kind from John’s. According to 7:39, the spirit is given only after Jesus’ “exaltation.” The appropriate conclusion seems to be that the gospel of John is historically accurate on this point and that the authors of the other gospels were unaware of, or suppressed, the tradition that Jesus baptized.³⁰

Collins argues further that such baptizing practices on the part of the historical Jesus would easily explain why it was that the early Christian communities themselves continued to initiate new converts by means of baptism. There would be, thus, a clear and direct continuity in practice between John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the New Testament churches. Indeed, the baptism to which Peter invites those who heard his sermon on the first Pentecost (“Repent, and be baptized every one of you . . . so that your sins may be forgiven,” Acts 2:38), even if now given “in the name of Jesus” for the reception of the Holy Spirit, parallels closely the type of baptism of repentance proclaimed and administered by John at the Jordan, received by Jesus according to the Synoptic Gospels, and, according to the Fourth Gospel, administered by Jesus and his disciples during his own ministry.³¹ If such an interpretation is correct, it may even shed light on a possible historical core behind the baptismal command placed on the lips of the risen Lord in Matthew 28:16–20. That is, while the specific details of this

³⁰ Collins, “The Origin of Christian Baptism,” 48–49.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

account—i.e., the trinitarian language and the “all nations” mission emphasis—may well reflect the post-Easter situation of the primitive church rather than that of Jesus, the attribution of an explicit baptismal command to him may be Matthew’s way of underscoring that the roots of Christian baptism do go back to Jesus’ own practice and that there is, indeed, some kind of continuity between the church’s baptismal practice and that of the historical Jesus himself.

Theologically, as well, it is important to note that the context of the references to Jesus’ baptizing practice in the Fourth Gospel is precisely a discussion of the meaning of baptism itself. Immediately before the first report of Jesus and his disciples baptizing in Judea (3:22) comes a significant conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus regarding the necessity of one being “born from above” (3:4) in order to see and enter the kingdom of God. And the manner of this divine “birth” is explicitly stated as accomplished through “water and Spirit” (3:5), that is, through baptism. Whether this particular conversation is historical or not, the theological understanding of baptism as a “new birth through water and the Holy Spirit” presented herein certainly reflects the meaning of *Christian* baptism within the Johannine community. The crucified and risen Jesus, who breathes the Holy Spirit on the disciples gathered together in the upper room in Jerusalem on the first Easter night (John 20), is the one who truly “baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” As noted above, this understanding of baptism as a divine and pneumatic “birth from above,” combined with the similar implications for baptism from the Synoptic accounts of Jesus’ own baptism, will become a central focus and paradigm for the practice and interpretation of Christian baptism especially within the Syrian, and some other, early Christian liturgical traditions.

Before leaving the witness of the Fourth Gospel, it is necessary to consider one other possible—and intriguing—initiation allusion or practice among, at least, some members of the Johannine community. This possible allusion is reflected in the unique Fourth Gospel account of Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper (John 13:1-20). Many Western Christians today, of course, know this rite only as an annual occurrence in conjunction with the opening liturgy of the paschal triduum on Holy or Maundy Thursday evening, where, after the reading of John 13 and the homily or sermon, it is ritually enacted as a dramatic parable by the presiding minister and representatives of the liturgical assembly. Most would certainly interpret the meaning of this liturgical act in a manner similar to that provided already by John

13:12 ff., that is, as a parable of servanthood and service in imitation of Christ's own servanthood.

As we know from later liturgical sources, however, a footwashing rite called the *Pedilavium* does become an important part of the rites of Christian initiation in a number of different places such as Milan, North Africa, Spain, Gaul, and Syria.³² Because of this, questions are surely raised as to whether its origins might also have an initiatory meaning and context and whether this is reflected or alluded to already in the account of John 13. In a compelling article,³³ Martin Connell subjects the received Greek text of John 13:1-20 and its variant readings to a detailed literary, text-critical, and redactional analysis and concludes that the original narrative comprised only verses 6-10, that is:

[Jesus] came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."

To this "original narrative," argues Connell, the final redactor(s) of the Fourth Gospel added a supplement (verses 12-20) which re-interprets the footwashing along the lines of servanthood and humility. No such interpretation, however, is present anywhere in 6-10. To the contrary, there the footwashing appears as a necessary rite ("If I do not wash you . . .") administered, like baptism elsewhere, in order to give the recipient a participatory "share" in Christ himself.

Within this "original narrative," Connell thus sees reflected the possibility that among some of the early communities that made up the intended audience of the Fourth Gospel³⁴ it was not baptism (as in the

³² See below, chapter 4, 145, and chapter 5, 170-71.

³³ Martin F. Connell, "Nisi Pedes, Except for the Feet: Footwashing in the Community of John's Gospel," *Worship* 70, no. 4 (1996): 20-30.

³⁴ On the nature and identity of these "Johannine" communities see Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). See also, Raymond Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).

Synoptic or “Petrine” led communities) but *footwashing* that constituted the rite of initiation. He writes:

Might not the footwashing itself, especially as this is captured in 13:6-10, have been the initiatory rite of some Johannine communities? Might it not have been the rite of sanctification which wiped away one’s sin or, to take from the Gospel, “made one entirely clean”? Recall the text’s “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me” (13:8), and “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet” (13:10). With these verses the footwashing takes on far more gravity than any of the same Gospel’s few references to baptism . . .³⁵

That such an initiation rite would come to be reinterpreted either as a supplement to baptism, as it does appear within some liturgical traditions, or as a rite signifying the humble servant character of the church, as it tends to function liturgically today, is perfectly logical. Whatever the fringe nature and identity of the early Johannine communities and their relationship with the more dominant Synoptic-based or Petrine-led churches once may have been, it is well known that, ultimately, at least part of the Johannine community—along with its gospel—came into communion with these other churches. In so doing, its own unique theological traditions and structures of “apostolic” leadership, symbolized by the “Beloved Disciple” throughout the Fourth Gospel, became either excised or made subservient to those of the other communities as the Fourth Gospel itself is further redacted along these interpretive lines.³⁶ If this is what happened in the relationship between the Synoptic and Johannine communities in terms of theology and leadership, then Connell is absolutely correct in suggesting that a similar process may also have taken place with regard to Johannine liturgical and sacramental rites. Footwashing does not go away but, at most, it remains either as a mere supplement to baptism or as an occasional dramatic rite demonstrating Christian service and humility.

The most intriguing implication of Connell’s contribution to this footwashing text is that it makes the question of the New Testament origins of Christian initiation even more complex than has been assumed previously. If Connell is correct about footwashing being the

³⁵ Connell, “*Nisi Pedes*, Except for the Feet,” 24.

³⁶ On this see the literature cited in note 34 above.

rite of Christian initiation within the Johannine communities, it means that from the beginning of Christianity there is variety and diversity not only in the theological interpretations of Christian initiation but in the very rites of initiation themselves. In other words, the possibility is raised that some Christian communities initiated new converts by a John the Baptizer-type of baptism, others by a footwashing, and perhaps even others by rites (e.g., handlaying and/or anointings) no longer clearly known to us. But both baptism and footwashing are attributed in the gospels to the authority of Jesus himself, who not only *was* baptized by John in the Jordan, according to the Synoptics, but possibly baptized others himself, and commanded his followers to do likewise. Or, is the so-called “editorial insertion” in John 4:2 (“it was not Jesus . . . but his disciples who baptized”) actually closer to the truth, after all? Was it only Jesus’ disciples who baptized, because Jesus himself washed feet?

CHRISTIAN INITIATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMUNITIES

Rites of Initiation in the New Testament Communities

However diverse the precise origins of the rites of Christian initiation may be, from the event of the first post-resurrection Pentecost on (Acts 2) it became, at least, the dominant tradition of the early churches to initiate new converts to the Christian faith through a ritual process that included a baptismal washing of some sort. The event and description of Pentecost itself are rather suggestive with regard to liturgy. That is, Luke’s account of Pentecost in Acts 2, certainly suggests that by the end of the first century there was already a strong correlation being made between the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles and the baptism of new Christian converts (*three thousand*, in fact!) on the very day of that Jewish feast.

PENTECOST AND BAPTISM IN ACTS 2:1-42

In two recent essays, “Sinai Revisited”³⁷ and “The Festival of Weeks and the Story of Pentecost in Acts 2,”³⁸ James VanderKam offers a

³⁷ James VanderKam, “Sinai Revisited,” in Matthias Henze, ed., *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 44–60.

³⁸ James VanderKam, “The Festival of Weeks and the Story of Pentecost in Acts 2,” in Craig A. Evans, ed., *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament in the New* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 185–205.

compelling exegetical analysis of Acts 2 in relationship to how Pentecost was already viewed and interpreted among various sectarian Jewish communities at the time of the writing of Acts. "The fact that an event so momentous as the outpouring of the Spirit on the first disciple band took place on the festival of Pentecost," notes VanderKam, "leads one to wonder whether more than mere coincidence of timing might have been involved. . . . Was there something about the festival, some associations with it, that led the author of Luke-Acts to couple it with the eschatological gifts of the divine Spirit?"³⁹ To this might be added the following: was there also something already "initiatory" in character about Pentecost somewhere in Judaism that would have led the author of Luke-Acts to connect Christian baptism with these eschatological gifts of the Spirit on this particular occasion?

The answer to both questions appears to be a resounding yes. The recent work on the origins of Christianity by Étienne Nodet and Justin Taylor has underscored not only the importance of the Essene/Qumran community and the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus, but the ritual practices of the sectarian Jewish community reflected in the *Book of Jubilees*, whose own liturgical calendar was followed by the Essenes. Within those documents, especially within the *Rule of the Community* or *Manual of Discipline* (1 QS 5:8) and the *Book of Jubilees* 6:17, the feast of Pentecost, occurring annually on a Sunday, always the fifteenth day of the third month of the year,⁴⁰ was reckoned as the most important feast of the year. It had no apparent connection to Passover (e.g., even Noah had celebrated it), and also included both an annual covenant renewal ceremony *and* the reception of new members into the community. As Nodet and Taylor write:

Pentecost, when the Covenant is renewed, is also the day for receiving new members, whose admission into the community is thereby an entry into the Covenant. That is the general setting of the Pentecost of Acts 2, and it is also a cornerstone in the Essene customs . . . ; this likeness is hardly surprising, since we are dealing with circles which originally were alike.⁴¹

³⁹ VanderKam, "The Festival of Weeks and the Story of Pentecost in Acts 2," 185.

⁴⁰ The *Jubilees* calendar was so constructed that the same day occurred on the same date every year. Such guaranteed the priority of the Sabbath since no festival would ever occur on the Sabbath.

⁴¹ Étienne Nodet and Justin Taylor, *The Origins of Christianity: An Exploration* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, Michael Glazier, 1998), 397.

The narrative of Pentecost in Luke 2:1-42, therefore, seems to have been influenced decidedly by the ways in which the Jewish Pentecost was already being interpreted and celebrated as a commemoration and renewal of the giving of the Law at Sinai within some forms of sectarian Judaism during the second and first centuries, C.E. According to VanderKam, this interpretation and celebration is especially to be noted within the *Rule of the Community* or *Manual of Discipline* of the Qumran community. He writes:

The evidence . . . makes it plausible to think that the community . . . fashioned itself to some extent after the Israelite nation at Sinai as traditionally understood. Like Israel then, they, in the wilderness, solemnly agreed to uphold the Sinaitic covenant *on the festival of weeks* and pledged to obey *all* the divine law mediated through Moses. Like ancient Israel they heard the law and understood it. They too formed a noble unity consisting of those pledged to the covenantal relationship. They organized themselves as ancient Israel had. They established a communal way of life in which much, including property, was shared. They too sanctified themselves, separating men from women and thus were in the requisite state of purity for God to appear and reveal his will, as ancient Israel had. All of the measures taken by the community seem to aim at establishing a holy entity unlike what the group saw in others. The Qumran community saw itself as re-creating the camp of Israel in the wilderness.⁴²

And, with regard to the early Christian community reflected in Acts 2, VanderKam concludes:

In the New Testament the earliest Jerusalem church, as pictured in Acts, exhibits a number of the same traits. That community was constituted in a new way at Pentecost. . . . On that day many new members were welcomed into the fellowship. Those first followers of Jesus also established a unity, an ideal society in which property was held in common, meals were eaten together, and prayers were offered in community. It too was a community that received revelation in this state in a dramatic divine manifestation.⁴³

In his 2000 Notre Dame doctoral dissertation, *August 15 and the Development of the Jerusalem Calendar*, Walter Ray argues that the

⁴² VanderKam, "Sinai Revisited," 59 (emphasis added).

⁴³ VanderKam, "The Festival of Weeks and the Story of Pentecost in Acts 2," 185.

early Jerusalem Jewish-Christian community represented in Acts employed precisely a Christianized version of the calendar of feasts in the *Book of Jubilees* and was decisively influenced by the form of Judaism reflected in that tradition.⁴⁴ If Ray is correct, the possibility emerges that what is reflected in Acts 2:1-42 is not simply a narrative use made of an interpretive or exegetical tradition. Rather, what is reflected may well be the very liturgical and calendrical practice of the early Jerusalem community, which had inherited and Christianized the practice—on *Pentecost* itself—of both the renewal of the Sinai covenant (though now explicitly associated with the new covenant sealed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of Jesus) and the reception of new members (though now with Christian baptism as the equivalent rite of “reception”).

Similarly, this approach might also shed light on the celebration and interpretation of baptism elsewhere in the New Testament and within various early Christian traditions. Adela Yarbro Collins, for example, notes close parallels between the baptism of John and the baptisms occurring on Pentecost and throughout the book of Acts. She argues that:

. . . the basic function of baptism as reflected in Peter’s Pentecost sermon is so similar to the baptism of John. New elements are added, but the starting point is the same. Peter calls for repentance, just as John is said to have done. Peter indicates that the baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. The same association is made in Mark and Matthew. Peter exhorts his Jewish audience, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” Their response is to submit to baptism. According to Matthew, going to John for baptism was a means of fleeing from “the wrath to come” (Matt 3:7). . . . There are two new elements in the function and meaning of baptism in Acts 2. One is that baptism occurs “in the name (*epi tō onomati*) of Jesus Christ” (v. 38). . . . The other new element is the association of baptism with the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). In Acts 1:5 the prophecy of John the Baptist is alluded to, that the Coming One would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Luke 3:16). The metaphorical fulfillment of that prophecy, with regard to the 120 or so followers of Jesus, is narrated in the beginning of Acts 2. Thereafter, the ritual of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Walter D. Ray, *August 15 and the Development of the Jerusalem Calendar* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2000).

⁴⁵ Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Origin of Christian Baptism,” in *LWSS*, 50–52.

It is again Walter Ray who has pointed to obvious parallels between what happens at Pentecost in Acts 2 and what happens in the first three chapters of Luke's Gospel with regard to Jesus' conception, birth, and baptism by John in the Jordan. In those chapters the promise of the Holy Spirit and its fulfillment constitute a narrative pattern and provide an *inclusio* linking Luke-Acts together:

This pattern is repeated several times in Luke-Acts. The first iteration [i.e., the Annunciation in Luke 1] puts it into relationship with a narrative pattern which . . . stretches the length of Luke's work: the promises to Abraham and their fulfillment. . . . [T]he significance of the Spirit for this promise becomes clearer with each iteration of the pattern, which includes the baptism of Jesus, the Pentecost event, and the account of the coming of the Spirit to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:1-11:18), which . . . is structurally parallel to Luke 1. In this last episode, the Holy Spirit descends on those who hear the words Peter is speaking . . . (Acts 10:44), the words by which they will be saved (11:14). Peter likens this event to the disciples' reception of the Spirit at Pentecost (10:47, 11:15-16).⁴⁶

This narrative pattern, however, is more than a literary *inclusio*. According to Ray, what lies behind it is precisely the narrative world of the calendar of Jubilees, wherein the festival of Pentecost on 3/15 is *simultaneously* the celebration of the birth of Isaac (conceived by Sarah on 6/15 = August 15). And, significantly, it is the Isaac-Jesus typology emerging from this tradition that occupies the principal theological attention of St. Paul, especially in his Galatian correspondence (see Gal 4:21-31). Ray writes:

The Feast of Weeks, understood as the 15th of the third month, had particular meaning for the Jubilees calendar as the completion of the fifty days, the time of the ultimate fulfillment of covenant renewal which was both promised and foreshadowed in the birth of Isaac. In its Christian form the final day of the feast would have been remembered as the time of divine adoption of the community and the giving of the Spirit (Acts 2, Gal 4:5-6), but also the time of particular revelation of the divine sonship of Jesus in the power of the Spirit, first in light of the resurrection/ascension (cf. Rom 1:3, Acts 2:33) but also in light of his special birth (Luke 1:35). . . . We should perhaps add Christ's

⁴⁶ Ray, *August 15 and the Jerusalem Calendar*, 220-21.

baptism to the list, where we again find the themes of divine sonship and the coming of the Spirit . . . [I]n Luke-Acts both the birth and baptism of Jesus manifest the same narrative pattern as Pentecost.⁴⁷

Interestingly enough, then, Jesus' own *beginnings*, according to Ray, whether at his conception, his birth in Bethlehem, or at what might be called his "spiritual birth" in the Jordan, have clear Pentecost connotations, quite possibly stemming from an early Jerusalem Christian adaptation of this ancient Qumran-Jubilees calendrical and narrative tradition. Or, to say that another way, the narrative of Jesus' baptism in the Synoptics, especially in Luke, may well be a narrative of how Christian baptisms took place in some ancient Christian communities, a ritual pattern influenced by the tradition of Pentecost baptism in the Jerusalem church.

ADDITIONAL OR ACCOMPANYING RITES

Whatever additional or accompanying rites may have existed in addition to the baptismal washing in the first century, Georg Kretschmar is certainly correct in asserting that "there is no apostolic norm in a bare immersion, without accompanying rites (nor is it probable that any such thing ever existed)."⁴⁸ But the problem with the numerous references and allusions to baptismal rites throughout the New Testament is that it is not often clear what these "accompanying rites" may have been. It is possible that there was some sort of preliminary period of instruction (or catechesis) for new converts, but, apart from the brief chariot ride discussion between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch leading to the latter's baptism (Acts 8:26-40), we know nothing about it or the extent of what such teaching may have been. Similarly, it is quite likely that the rite would have included some kind of profession of faith in Jesus Christ in one form or another but, again, *explicit* baptismal professions of faith are lacking in the New Testament. Or, with regard to possible pre- or postbaptismal rites of anointing with oil, possibly suggested by references to having been "anointed" and "sealed" by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 1 John 2:20) and to God's servants having been marked with this "seal on their foreheads" (Rev 7:3), we simply do not know whether a literal initiatory practice is being described or a metaphorical interpretation of initiation

⁴⁷ Ibid., 262.

⁴⁸ Georg Kretschmar, "Recent Research on Christian Initiation," in LWSS, 33.

is intended.⁴⁹ While an actual liturgical practice could certainly have suggested such a metaphor, the fact that Acts 10:38 describes Jesus as having been “anointed . . . with the Holy Spirit and with power” at his own baptism, where no gospel account specifies anything of the sort, might tend to argue more toward a metaphorical meaning in these other passages as well. But, at the same time, since the practice of using scented olive oil as soap and even perfume before, during, and/or after bathing is well documented in the Greco-Roman world, it may be more surprising if actual anointings had not been a part of Christian baptismal practice.⁵⁰

One “accompanying rite” described in the New Testament with some detail, however, is a postbaptismal rite of handlaying, which is interpreted in relationship to the giving of the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:14-17 tells of certain Samaritan converts who, having received baptism “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” had not received the Holy Spirit. Only when the apostles Peter and John laid hands on them and prayed for the Holy Spirit did that Spirit finally come to them. Similarly, in Acts 19:1-7 we read of twelve disciples in Ephesus who had not received (or even heard of) the Holy Spirit, but had been baptized only with John the Baptizer’s “baptism of repentance.” In response to Paul, they are baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and then, through the laying on of Paul’s hands, they too receive the Holy Spirit.

If, in the light of a much later Western (but only *Western*) split between baptism and what will come to be called “confirmation,” such a postbaptismal rite seems clear and obvious, the interpretation of Acts 8:14-17 and 19:1-7 is anything but clear and obvious. Some scholars have assumed that what is described in these two events reflects a

⁴⁹ See Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, Second Edition (London: SPCK, 2002), 60–61.

⁵⁰ Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 26ff., argues that more ritual weight should be given to anointing references in the New Testament. For the use of oil in a Greco-Roman context see Fikret Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Garrett G. Fagan, *Bathing in Public in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), and J. DeLaine and D.E. Johnston eds., *Roman Baths and Bathing* (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archeology, 1999). I owe these references to Greco-Roman uses of oil to Bryan Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism; From the New Testament to the Council of Trent* (Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 35–36.

general two-stage ritual pattern of Christian initiation in the primitive communities with baptism followed immediately by a pneumatic handlaying rite.⁵¹ Such a two-fold ritual pattern may even be reflected in Luke's account of Jesus' own baptism (Luke 3:21-22), where the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus only *after* he was baptized and while he was praying.⁵² Although the Holy Spirit was a life-giving reality related to the forgiveness of sins bestowed in baptism, according to these scholars, Luke's understanding is that the Spirit is a prophetic force only loosely connected to baptism, and the gift of this prophetic or ecstatic Spirit is thus ritualized by means of a different rite.⁵³ Other scholars would find such an interpretation to be anachronistic, that is, reading back into the New Testament a ritual pattern known only on the basis of later practice. Alternatively, these scholars have tended to underscore the apparent exceptional contexts and situations of both Acts 8 and 19. The account in Acts 8 is concerned with the conversion and Christian initiation of *Samaritans*, whose conversion and initiation came about not by or under the direction of the Jerusalem apostles, but through the mission of Philip. So, by having the apostles Peter and John go to Samaria to lay hands on these converts, Luke is underscor-

⁵¹ See Thomas Marsh, *Gift of Community: Baptism and Confirmation* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984). But see the response to Marsh in Frank Quinn, "Confirmation Reconsidered: Rite and Meaning," in LWSS, 219-37. For a discussion of all the pertinent baptismal texts in Luke-Acts, see also Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, second, revised edition (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 23-41. On handlaying in the New Testament see also John Fleter Tipei, *The Laying on of Hands in the New Testament*, PhD Dissertation, Department of Biblical Studies (University of Sheffield, 2000); Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, volume 31 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1998); Joseph Coppens, "L'imposition des mains dans les Actes des Apôtres," in Jacob Kremer, ed., *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, Rédaction, Théologie* (Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1979), 405-38. I owe many of these references to my doctoral student, Michael Whitehouse, who is preparing his dissertation precisely on the role and theology of handlaying in the early rites of Christian initiation.

⁵² See the discussion of this in McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism*, 24-25.

⁵³ See Marsh, *Gift of Community*, 27-67; and Gerard Austin, *Anointing with the Spirit: The Rite of Confirmation: The Use of Oil and Chrism* (New York: Pueblo, 1985), 6-9.

ing one of his key emphases throughout the book of Acts. That is, all Christian missionary work must somehow be subordinated to or ratified by the apostles in Jerusalem themselves. Along similar lines, the context and situation in Acts 19:1-7 concerns those who had received only *John's* baptism, not *Christian* baptism. Such situations as these can hardly be seen as reflecting some sort of normative pattern, but, rather, specific and unique occasions.⁵⁴

It is undoubtedly true that in some primitive communities hand-laying rites were used to ritualize the gift of the Holy Spirit in Christian initiation. Some have suggested that the following reference in Hebrews 6:1-2 is precisely an indication of this: “. . . let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” Others argue that the reference is too vague, does not clearly refer to the Holy Spirit, and so is unclear as to whether it has any initiatory significance all.⁵⁵

The exceptional situations in Acts 8 and 19, however, do suggest that one should not generalize here toward some kind of universal ritual practice in the primitive church. These texts from Acts, together with Hebrews 6:2, then, probably tell us very little about “normal” initiation practices in the apostolic period. Indeed, if postbaptismal pneumatic handlaying was an “apostolic” initiatory practice, one would expect to find it as a universal feature within the later initiation rites of both East and West. But, as we shall see, such is certainly not the case.

⁵⁴ See McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism*, 31–39; and Austin, *Anointing*, 7–9.

⁵⁵ See the summary of different views in McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 53–55. A recent article suggests that the Hebrews 6:2 reference to “teaching about baptisms” may be about, or, at least, include martyrdom as a “baptism in blood.” See Anthony R. Cross, “The Meaning of ‘Baptisms’ in Hebrews 6:2,” in Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, eds., *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 34 (London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 163–87. On the interpretation of Hebrews in general, see Harold W. Attridge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), especially 164–65.

Furthermore, Acts 8 and Acts 19 are not the only places in Acts that treat the relationship between Christian baptism and the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶ Not only does Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:38) imply no separate postbaptismal handlaying rite for the gift of the Holy Spirit, but Acts 10:44-48 tells of the Holy Spirit coming upon Gentiles in Caesarea during another of Peter's sermons even *before* they are baptized. In fact, it is this very *prebaptismal* gift of the Holy Spirit that comes to serve as the basis *for* their subsequent and immediate baptism. Peter says here: "'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:47-48). Something similar is described regarding the initiation of Paul in Acts 9, after his sight-losing Damascus road experience. That is, Paul's sight is not only restored but the Holy Spirit comes upon him through the laying on of Ananias' hands (Acts 9:17) *before* he is baptized (Acts 9:18).

The most that we can assume on the basis of these few baptismal events described in Acts, then, is that, for the earliest Christians, baptism and the Holy Spirit were bound together inseparably. In some places no ritual act other than baptism itself was used to ritualize this gift. In others there was quite possibly the addition of "accompanying rites" such as the postbaptismal handlaying we see on these occasions in Acts and maybe Hebrews 6:2, or in still others perhaps some kind of anointing with oil, which might be implied by other New Testament texts. It is even possible that the sequence of the coming of the Holy Spirit *before* baptism in the case of the Gentiles in Caesarea and Paul himself in Damascus reflects yet another pattern of Christian initiation within some early communities. Indeed, a number of scholars have suggested that 1 John 5:7-8 ("There are three that testify; the Spirit and the water and the blood . . .") is an allusion to such a ritual sequence of initiation with the gift of the Holy Spirit ritualized somehow first, and then followed by baptism ("water"), and first communion

⁵⁶ Joel B. Green has drawn attention to the fact that in Luke-Acts there is not a specific theology of baptism but a variety of interpretations. See his "From 'John's Baptism' to 'Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus': The Significance of Baptism in Luke-Acts," in Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, eds., *Baptism, the New Testament, and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R.E.O. White*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 171 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 157-72.

("the blood").⁵⁷ But whether the Holy Spirit comes before, during, or after baptism, the point is that baptism and the Holy Spirit are seen as closely united. Since, for some reason, the gift of the Holy Spirit was absent from the baptism of the Samaritans in Acts 8 and from those who received only the baptism of John in Acts 19, this anomalous situation had to be remedied by the apostles themselves so that this normal relationship between baptism and the Holy Spirit would be (re)connected.

If we are unclear about the existence or precise identity, frequency, and normativity of "accompanying rites" to baptism in the New Testament churches, we are equally unclear about a number of details regarding the rite of baptism itself in this early period. At least three questions are suggested: how were the earliest Christian baptisms administered; what words were used in the conferring of baptism; and were infants baptized in the time of the New Testament?

How were the earliest Christian baptisms administered?

In her book on the architecture and meaning of baptismal fonts, S. Anita Stauffer notes that there have been four different modes of conferring baptism throughout history: (1) *submersion*, also called *dipping*, in which the candidate is completely submerged under the baptismal waters; (2) *immersion*, in which the candidate stands or kneels in rather shallow water and the water is either poured over the head of the candidate or the candidate's head itself is pushed partially into the water; (3) *affusion*, in which water is poured over the head of the candidate; and (4) *aspersion*, in which the baptismal candidate is merely sprinkled with water.⁵⁸ The earliest modes of baptism were probably either *submersion* or *immersion*, but it is often difficult to tell which was preferred. When Paul compares baptism to the Christian's death and burial in Christ (Rom 6:3-11), for example, it is quite likely that he

⁵⁷ See Edward C. Ratcliff, "The Old Syrian Baptismal Tradition and its Resettlement under the Influence of Jerusalem in the Fourth Century," *Studies in Church History* 2 (1965), 19-37; Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 147-48; and J. Ramsey Michaels, "By Water and Blood: Sin and Purification in John and First John," in Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, eds., *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 34 (London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 149-62.

⁵⁸ S. Anita Stauffer, *On Baptismal Fonts: Ancient and Modern*, Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study 29-30 (Bramcote/Nottingham: Grove Books, Ltd., 1994), 9-10.

has the mode of *submersion* in mind. But evidence from early iconographic depictions of Jesus' own baptism by John shows *immersion* as the mode, and what archeological evidence there is of specific Christian baptismal spaces reveals rather shallow fonts in which *submersion* would have been extremely difficult.⁵⁹ At the same time, while the practices of *affusion* and *aspersion* became increasingly common only later in the history of the (Western) Church, when the majority of baptismal candidates were infants, there is some evidence for the practice of both of these modes in the early church as well. In other words, we do not know enough about specific baptismal practices within the various New Testament communities to suggest that one mode of baptismal administration was normatively practiced over another.

What words were used in the conferring of baptism?

Western Christians have inherited from Medieval Scholasticism a sacramental theology that defines valid sacraments generally as the combination of proper "matter" (i.e., water) and "form" (i.e., the trinitarian formula, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"). Because of this, it has been natural to view the baptismal command of the risen Lord in Matthew 28:16-20 as indicating that such a "formula" for baptism was already in use in Matthew's community in the late first century. Or, with regard to the phrase "baptism in [or "into"] the name of Jesus" (or "Lord Jesus," or "Lord Jesus Christ"), frequently occurring throughout the book of Acts, it has been natural to assume also that something like "I baptize you in the name of Jesus" functioned as a specific baptismal formula within the communities of Luke-Acts.

Both assumptions may well be accurate but, again, anachronism should be avoided here. The only reference outside of Acts I am aware of for the use of "in the name of Jesus" as a possible formula is in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 9:7-8, where in *baptizing herself*, Thecla says: "In [into?] the name of Jesus Christ, I am baptized on my last day. . . ."⁶⁰ Explicit liturgical evidence for the use of a trinitarian baptismal formula within baptismal rites is known only later in both East and West,

⁵⁹ In addition to the mosaic from the Arian baptistery at Ravenna, which appears on the cover of this book, see the examples in Regina Kuehn, *A Place for Baptism* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992), 36-38.

⁶⁰ ANF, VIII, 490. As in various descriptions of early Syrian baptismal rites, fire blazes in this context as well.

and for that matter, only much later in the West. Concerning either of these phrases in the New Testament, then, it is quite possible that they are intended not as liturgical formulas at all but as theological or catechetical interpretations of the very *meaning* of baptism itself. That is, to be baptized “in” or “into the name of Jesus” is to be baptized into Christ, to be associated as closely as possible with Christ himself as the very mediator of God’s salvation.⁶¹ Similarly, to be baptized into Christ is to receive the Holy Spirit, who creates a new relationship between the baptized and God and enables the newly baptized to address God, in the words of Jesus, as “Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6-7). Hence, to be baptized either “in [into] the name of Jesus,” or “in [into] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” at this stage of liturgical development need be nothing other than what Aidan Kavanagh has called a “theological declaration”⁶² of the new relationship that baptism establishes between the baptized and God, a relationship signified in the paradigmatic story of Jesus’ own baptism in the Jordan, where his identity as “Son” in relationship to both “Father” (“You are [“This is”] my Son, the Beloved)” and “Holy Spirit” is proclaimed.

Were infants baptized in the time of the New Testament?

Specific answers to this question have often been based on the confessional positions of those who give them. Traditionally, those who deny the propriety of baptizing infants have noted (correctly) that there are no references to infant baptism anywhere in the New Testament, while those who defend the practice argue that it is possible, if not probable, that infants were baptized from the very beginnings of the church.⁶³ Since references to the baptism of entire “households” do

⁶¹ See Collins, “The Origin of Christian Baptism,” 50–52; and Lars Hartman, *“Into the Name of the Lord Jesus”: Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997).

⁶² Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 22. Given the paucity of evidence for the use of baptism “in (into) the name of Jesus” in Christian antiquity, I wonder if the precise formulaic use of the phrase is related more to contemporary movements within various evangelical forms of Protestantism, where it is used rather frequently, than it is to any New Testament or classic tradition of baptizing.

⁶³ The classic debate along such confessional lines is between Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), and Joachim Jeremias, *The Origins of Infant Baptism: A Further Study in Reply to Kurt Aland* (Naperville, IL: A.R. Allenson, 1963). Today, however, debates about the role of infant baptism take place within rather than

occur in the New Testament (Acts 16:15; Acts 18:8; and 1 Cor 1:16), it is *possible* that infants were included here as well.⁶⁴ But these references are silent on the specific question of infants, and an argument from silence is always the most difficult kind either to defend or refute. We do know that at least some early Christian traditions did initiate infants and children at a date early enough for the practice to be considered traditional already by the late second century.⁶⁵ And, in a recent and quite compelling article, Anthony Lane has concluded on the basis of a great toleration for a diversity of practice regarding infant baptism among Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries, where no one claims that the practice is “unapostolic or wrong in principle,” that it probably does come as one practice from apostolic times.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, within the New Testament period itself the primary candidate for Christian initiation would have been an adult. Based primarily, again, on descriptions of baptism from Acts, Aidan Kavanagh conveniently summarizes the general pattern of the Christian initiation of adults in the New Testament as following a four-step sequence:

First . . . the proclamation of the gospel . . . always precedes baptism. . . . Second, the normal response of those who hear the gospel proclaimed is expected to be conversion to faith in the exalted Lord. . . . Third, the gospel proclaimed and believed usually results in the water bath itself. . . . Fourth, there are the events that follow water baptism. . . . [That is,] what apostolic proclamation, conversion, and baptism in water and Spirit—the whole initiatory process—resulted in was life in a Spirit-filled community living by apostolic teaching, in unity with apostolic witnesses of the risen Lord who is exalted and now become life-giving Spirit for his people, through eucharistic prayer at home and petitionary prayer in the synagogue. The regular postbaptismal events at this period are not a series of specific liturgical “completions” of an only partial water rite, but full and robust engagement in the Church itself: a whole new

across denominational boundaries. See Paul F.X. Covino, “The Postconciliar Infant Baptism Debate in the American Catholic Church,” in *LWSS*, 327–49.

⁶⁴ But see Joel B. Green, “‘She and her household were baptized’ (Acts 16:15),” *Household Baptism in the Acts of the Apostles*, in Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, eds., *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, 72–90.

⁶⁵ See below, chapter 3, 89–90.

⁶⁶ Anthony Lane, “Did the Apostolic Church Baptise Babies? A Seismological Approach,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 55, no. 1 (2004): 109–30.

ethic and way of life. . . . Here is the common ground that serves as articulation point for all the multivalent practices that enter the initiatory continuum.⁶⁷

With regard to any regular “accompanying rites,” the age of baptismal candidates, and even the very mode of conferring baptism itself, therefore, the New Testament leaves us with many more questions than answers. Unfortunately, we do not know enough, beyond the rather general description of the sort provided above by Kavanagh, to say with absolute certainty what the regular shape of the rites of initiation was within the primitive Christian communities. Instead, what we see in the New Testament are a number of distinct theological interpretations of the experience of becoming a Christian.

Theological Interpretations of Initiation in the New Testament

Whatever the particular rites employed in the Christian initiation of new converts in the primitive communities may have been, it is clear from the New Testament that the *meaning* of initiation itself was understood in a variety of different ways. These numerous ways include: forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38); new birth through water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5; Titus 3:5-7); putting off of the old self and putting on the new, that is, being clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Gal 3:27; Col 3:9-10); initiation into the one body of the Christian community (1 Cor 12:13; see also Acts 2:42); washing, sanctification, and justification in Christ and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11); enlightenment (Heb 6:4; 10:32; 1 Pet 2:9); being anointed and/or sealed by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:21-22; 1 John 2:20, 27); being sealed or marked as belonging to God and God’s people (2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13-14; 4:30; Rev 7:3); and, of course, being joined to Christ through participation in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:3-11; Col 2:12-15).

Paul Bradshaw has noted that “this variation in baptismal theology encourages the supposition that the ritual itself may also have varied considerably from place to place.”⁶⁸ And if not present in some places already, these theological interpretations will certainly give rise to specific ritual practices later. Literal anointings with oil, for example, will develop in all early Christian liturgical traditions to express ritually the

⁶⁷ Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 20–23.

⁶⁸ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 61.

gift, anointing, and seal of the Holy Spirit in initiation. Putting off the old nature and being clothed with the new nature of Christ (Gal 3:27) will eventually be expressed by prebaptismal strippings of clothes and postbaptismal clothings in new white garments. Either connected to an anointing or not, the mark of God's ownership of the newly initiated will come to be signified by various signings or consignations with the cross. Enlightenment will be expressed by the use of baptismal candles or tapers. And the baptismal font and waters will come to be interpreted as either or both womb (John 3:5) and tomb (Rom 6), grave and mother—or both, and such a theology will give rise architecturally to how fonts themselves will come be shaped: tomb-like appearance; eight-sided reflecting the entrance into the eighth day or first day of the new creation; quatrolobe to suggest the shape of the cross; six-sided to suggest the Passion; and circular to suggest a womb.⁶⁹ Given the rich variety of New Testament interpretations of Christian initiation, it was only inevitable that the rites themselves would evolve in this way. That is, a rich biblical theology such as this would seem to call for an equally rich liturgical expression and practice.

Of all these New Testament interpretations, however, two will stand out with particular emphasis in the evolving life of the church: Christian initiation as new birth through water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5ff. and Titus 3:5); and Christian initiation as being united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:3-11).⁷⁰ The first of these finds its foundation in Jesus' own baptism by John in the Jordan—if not in Pentecost itself—and the second, of course, in the ultimate completion of that baptism in his death on the cross. Liturgical scholars have sometimes asserted that the contrast between these images is *Johannine* ("birth") and *Pauline* ("death and burial"). But this is more apparent than real. Baptismal regeneration, new birth, and adoption images are also Pauline. That is, in addition to Titus 3:5, the bap-

⁶⁹ On fonts see Stauffer, *On Baptismal Fonts*; J.G. Davies, *The Architectural Setting of Baptism* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1962); and Regina Kuehn, *A Place for Baptism* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992).

⁷⁰ On the use of Romans 6 in baptismal theology see Alistair Campbell, "Dying with Christ: The origin of a Metaphor?" in Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, eds., *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R.E.O. White*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 171 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 273-94.

tismal theology of Galatians, for example, is especially that of *adoption* in Christ, becoming in the *Son* a child of God, brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit who cries out “Abba, Father!” in the baptized (Gal 4:1-7). Further, while these two interpretations need not be mutually exclusive, and, indeed, will be brought ultimately to a kind of synthesis later in the history of the church, each one by itself will serve as the dominant interpretation of Christian initiation within specific early liturgical traditions. Not surprisingly, then, it is around these two primary interpretations that all the other New Testament images and metaphors as particular ceremonies will eventually tend to cluster.

CONCLUSION

This chapter began with a discussion of Jesus’ inclusive, egalitarian, table companionship “with tax collectors and sinners” as the primary way in which Jesus himself ritually enacted and invited others, indeed, all, to share already in the great banquet of the kingdom of God drawing near. If, as we have seen, the witness of the Fourth Gospel is historically accurate about Jesus as a baptizer himself, then it is quite possible that Jesus and his disciples did, in fact, baptize others into this table companionship. Or, if there were any pre-requisite rites of entrance at all, perhaps Jesus’ own manner of initiation into such table community was the servant rite of footwashing as a sign of the kind of table service, ministry, and hospitality that those who sat at table with him would be expected to offer to others.

Whatever Jesus’ own initiatory practices may have been, however, Jesus himself was baptized by John in the Jordan at the beginning of his public ministry, and, at least since the first post-Easter Pentecost, the normal pattern of initiation into that continuation of Jesus’ table companionship called church has been some form of baptism “in water and the Holy Spirit.” And, like Jesus’ own eating practices themselves, this rite of Christian initiation into Christ and his table has been radically inclusive, open to all as the very place where those customary human (and sinful) distinctions between people based on race or ethnicity, social status, or gender are transcended by the new eschatological (end-time) creation, the radical new humanity of the Second Adam, God’s Son and Servant, Jesus the Christ.⁷¹ Paul writes of this

⁷¹ See John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (New York: Harper-SanFrancisco, 2005), 227–28.

new situation brought about by God's salvific act in Christ and mediated through baptism, saying,

. . . for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:26-27)

It is to the evolution of these great equalizing rites of death, burial, new life, and new creation in Christ and their theological interpretation throughout the history of the church that the following chapters are devoted.