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Origins and Developments  
of Christian Baptism.  
(To the year 230AD)

Submitted for the Degree of MTh

The Faculty of Divinity  
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## ABBREVIATIONS.

C.S.E.L.	Corpus Scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum.
E.T.	Expository Times.
G.C.S.	Griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderten.
G.L.	Left Ginza.
G.R.	Right Ginza.
H.T.R.	Harvard Theological Review.
I.C.C.	International Critical Commentary.
J.T.S.	Journal of Theological Studies.
P.G.	Patrologia graeca, ed. J.P. Migne. Paris, 1857-66.
Z.R.G.G.	Zeitschrift für Religions - und Geistesgeschichte.
Z.T.K.	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche.

The paper which follows is not an attempt to prove or disprove any particular theories of baptism. It will, rather, try to survey some of the baptismal references to be found in Biblical books and in documents both of the mainstream Church and of the less orthodox (or totally non-orthodox) sects, which were written within the first two hundred years of the Church's history.

The existence of washing rites in many religions other than Christianity, and pre-dating Christianity, is indisputable and requires no further proof, therefore, the fact that the Christian Church itself adopted such a practice can hardly be surprising and there is no reason to expect that the origins of this baptismal practice should be found solely in the New Testament. To say that this is so does not in any way devalue the rite of baptism but acknowledges that the Church did not exist in isolation from the world around it - a world in which ritual washings were commonly practised.

In the following pages the baptismal references which are discussed are not necessarily those from the most reputable or esteemed sources, nor are some of the views expressed those most widely accepted in modern studies, but they are of some general interest and as such have been included here. Even though, in the end, they might prove to say little or nothing about Christian baptism, that is in itself a comment (indirect and negative perhaps) upon the Christian rite.

Because some of the sources used in this work are now out-dated and otherwise long-forgotten; because some of the primary sources are not the most commonly cited; because

the study of sources is not exhaustive, it might be thought that, somewhere between the lines, a case is being made for or against particular attitudes within the Church or academic community. It must, therefore, be stated that this is definitely not the writer's intent.

It might be suggested that to begin with Hippolytus and to try to imply any connection between the baptismal rite recorded so fully by him and the modern Roman Catholic rite is to call into question the validity of the Roman Catholic tradition of baptism. This kind of criticism might be levelled at various points in the work regarding different sections of the Church and their practices (baptism or otherwise). In the hope, then, that all that follows will be read in the spirit in which it was written, it should perhaps be pointed out that the comparison between the rite of Hippolytus and that of the modern Roman Catholic Church is drawn by Edward Yarnold SJ in his book "The Awe Inspiring Rites of Initiation" (pp265ff) - a book approved by the Roman Catholic Church. In this work such comparisons are noted as being of interest even if they actually prove nothing, and that may best summarise the trend of this whole paper.

## INTRODUCTION



The amount of writing which has been devoted to the field of Christian baptism is vast, so vast in fact that further writing on this topic may appear to be redundant. Previous works, however, have devoted attention almost totally to what are regarded as orthodox sources and practices, and have tended to show concern for one particular area within the whole baptismal theme.

Jeremias, for example, is concerned mainly with the tradition of baptising infants during the first few centuries <sup>1</sup>. From his thorough study of the available material he concludes that the baptism of infants was an accepted practice from the earliest days of the Church with only two Christian writers opposed to this: Tertullian<sup>2</sup>, who advised the delay of baptism of the children of pagan parents, except in the case of emergency baptism (which was administered "in extremis"), and Gregory of Nazianzus<sup>3</sup> who advised postponing the rite until the child was about three years old. In favour of infant baptism Jeremias would cite the blessing of the children in Matthew 19:13-15, the baptismal reference in John 3:5, the similarity of the Christian rite to circumcision and the development of the doctrine of original sin whose beginnings, he claims, are found in Origen, Cyprian and in Tertullian's De Anima. There can be little doubt that he is correct in his conclusion <sup>4</sup> that the postponement of baptism in the fourth century until children had passed the stage of adolescence was due to superstitious misunderstanding of the rite rather than to any well-founded theological or traditional reasons. Jeremias concludes that Paul regards baptism as replacing circumcision since he did

not consider circumcision to be necessary for Christians, and since circumcision was a rite administered to infants (albeit only male children) Jeremias considers it "very probable" that Christian parents had their children baptised <sup>5</sup>. Regarding Matthew 19:13-15 (et al) he concedes that this narrative of the blessing of the children has nothing to do with baptism, but is rather an example of a Jewish tradition for the Day of Atonement when parents took their children to the elders for blessing. However, in answer to the question, "Why did the primitive Church hand down the story?" he states that by around 200AD. the passage was generally understood to be of baptismal significance <sup>6</sup>, and claims that this understanding of it was probably older. From an examination of the relevant passages he concludes that the Church must have regarded this as authority for the practice of infant baptism <sup>7</sup>, and, therefore, that at the time the Gospel of Mark was written, Christian parents in Rome had their children baptised.

Jeremias is also concerned with proving that references to the baptism of households in the New Testament are also references to infant and child baptism <sup>8</sup>; that there was no age limit placed on baptism in the first two centuries <sup>9</sup> and that it was generally accepted before 200 AD. and was not merely introduced in the third century <sup>10</sup>. He is thus concerned with the relatively narrow field of infant baptism, and his study of the sources is naturally influenced and limited by this specific concern with proving that infant baptism was an established practice from the earliest days of the Church.

G.W.H. Lampe <sup>11</sup> demonstrates concern with another aspect of Christian Baptism: the relationship between baptism and confirmation, and his study in turn works from the basis of this concern, concluding that confirmation is a valuable and significant rite but that it cannot be placed on the same level with baptism, although it does help remedy some of the problems which are attached to infant baptism <sup>12</sup>. His area of study, therefore, begins with the Pauline and Apostolic age, with consideration of examples of "sealing" which are to be found prior to the New Testament practice, and the major part of the work deals with the practice and witness of the Church itself. The Church's use of oil and chrism, its employment of "signing" and "imposition of the hand", the concept of a rite which contributes something to the baptismal experience become still more interesting and take on a universal human significance when set in the context of rites which pre-date Christianity or which are quite independent of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, yet whose similarity to the Christian rite is undeniable. This is not to denigrate the Christian rites, but rather to enrich them by showing the truly complete humanness of the practices of the community of the people of God; showing that the Church is not afraid to be in the world, though it is not of the world.

This paper, therefore, although limited in the span of time it covers, does not restrict itself to a concern with New Testament baptism and the practice of the Church or even to the Judaeo-Christian tradition but tries to give consideration to a wider range of influence upon the baptism

-al rite, including both non-Jewish, non-Christian practices and also unorthodox Christian practices and beliefs. Nor does it restrict itself to a defence of any one or any series of modern baptismal practices, seeking rather the origins of the rite as a whole so that from that knowledge a better understanding of any form of the rite may be reached.

It will be shown that the rite of Christian baptism is not a unique practice, and that it has been influenced by sources outwith orthodox Judaeo-Christian tradition, will be considered.

### The Historical Setting

When compared with the whole history of mankind, the existence of Christianity has, so far, been very brief, constituting only a fifth or sixth of the relatively short history of civilised man (ie. man in something approaching urban communities). Animism and polytheism predate Christianity by a long way; Hinduism in its early forms existed more than a thousand years before Christ, and Judaism is older than this; Confucius' lifetime was in the sixth and fifth centuries before Christ, and the Buddha and possibly Zoroaster date also to this period. This leaves only Manichaeism and Islam to follow Christianity, and Manichaeism has not survived, so that of all the religions yet in existence Christianity is the second youngest, and in considering the origins of any of the Church's practices it is of importance to remember that this

is so. Also important is the fact that the early Church made no lasting impact on the great Persian empire, China, or on India; nor, during the first five centuries of its existence, did it have any effect upon the "primitive" \* races who constituted the vast majority of mankind.

Christianity developed in an area of great cultural variety, but dominated mainly by the cultures of Greece and Rome.

Jesus was born in the reign of Augustus; the Mediterranean wars had ended, and political unity under Rome had been achieved. The period of peace which followed facilitated the spread of religions and philosophies in this area which had never before enjoyed, or, at least, had never before been subjected to, such unified political control. With peace under Roman rule went the building of roads, extensive travel and vastly increased trade. Yet, despite imperial security there was a considerable lack of personal security, for people had been uprooted as slaves or soldiers, or by the desire for improved lifestyle, and they sought a faith which would give them security in the form of companionship, of immortality, of self-respect. Also, in the environment of city life where, then as now, the atmosphere was predominantly impersonal, the ground was fertile for the growth of new religions.

Many religions captured the interest of the people. There were the state cults of the Empire, and the mystery religions which originated mainly in Egypt, Syria, Anatolia and Persia. Philosophy too was prominent in the society of this period, although the only new school to emerge after

the birth of Christ was that of Middle Platonism, and even it, not surprisingly, owed much to Platonism. The most influential philosophies were those of Stoicism, Epicureanism, of the Platonists, the Pythagoreans, the Cynics and the Peripatetics (Aristotelians). In addition, there was Judaism which attracted many non-Jews who either adopted fully the Jewish laws or remained adherents to Judaism.

During the last part of the second century and the beginning of the third the Imperial cult remained strong both in Rome itself and in the provinces while the local cults and the Mithraic and Pythagorean mysteries increased their popularity. The Church also expanded at this time, although its expansion could not be said to match that of Mithraism, and it was in the early years of the third century that the Church began to increase its number of buildings and cemeteries. Apart from the years 202-203, this was a period of relative calm for the Church, except in Africa. For, during 195- 215 Christians in Africa were persecuted in the same way as Asian Christians had suffered about a generation before. By the year 200 Christians were active in North Africa, especially in the area of Carthage, in some parts of modern Tunisia and Algeria, and it was here that the earliest Christian literature of importance in Latin was produced. This was possibly due in part to Italian immigration to the area after the conquest of Carthage by Rome. With this region are associated the names of Tertullian and Cyprian. Christianity was also established in Southern Spain by this time, and in the latter half of the century there is evidence of it in Gaul, and it was already strong in the Greek speaking communities of Lyons and Vienne. Toward

the end of the third century, some of the cities of the Rhine were under episcopal authority. A little earlier than this, Christianity had taken root in Britain, three British bishops attending the council of Arles in Southern Gaul in the early fourth century.

The social background of the early Christians is uncertain. All that can be said is that initially they were city dwellers; that they were Jews and Gentiles interested in Judaism, and later they were the Greek speaking inhabitants of the Hellenistic sections of the cities, and soon after included the Syriac speaking peoples of Syria and of the Tigris Euphrates Valley. Although tradition has it that Christianity consisted of slaves and freedmen, of the underprivileged and the ignorant, it has to be said that among the original Christians of Jerusalem there were both the poor and the wealthy. Since there were far greater numbers of uneducated than of educated people in the Empire and more poor than wealthy, it seems likely that the same would be true of the Church.

What is certain of the history of the Church is that in the first three centuries it met with often severe persecution which reached its height in the early fourth century. This came at first from those who held to Judaism and later from the Roman authorities for their refusal to participate in worship of the Emperor, for misunderstanding of their eucharistic meals, and for fear of the effect that such a united front would have on the social and political order of the Empire. Christians, therefore, were accused of treason and sacrilege, of being members of a foreign cult which was unlicensed, and also of

practising magic. The correspondence between the Emperor Trajan (AD. 98 - 117) and Pliny the Younger, who was the imperial legate in Bithynia, demonstrates the Roman fear and suspicion of the Christians. Latin authors claimed the existence of ten major persecutions beginning with that of Nero in the first century and reaching their climax in that of Diocletian in the early fourth century, corresponding to the ten plagues of Egypt. The truth, however, is that those from Nero to 250 seem to have been local persecutions; those which followed tended to involve the whole Empire. The second century and the first half of the third show only occasional signs of persecution. From early in the second century come the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, written on his way to Rome as a Christian martyr. From later in the same century comes the Martyrdom of Polycarp. During this period, however, it seems reasonable to assume that Christians had a precarious existence: they could be challenged, and if they persisted in the Faith they were liable to execution. After the short period of persecution under Septimius Severus early in the third century, there was a period of relative peace and security for Christians during the first half of the century (except for 235 - 238) and the Church experienced rapid growth <sup>13</sup>.



## The Catacombs and Dura Europos

From this period comes the House Church at Dura Europos (c. 232), a Roman border fortress on the Euphrates excavated in 1934 and 1935. From the baptistery in the House Church comes the earliest pictorial evidence of the Christian rite of baptism. On a wall behind the covered baptismal font is a fresco of the Shepherd and the Fall; above this are the Healed Paralytic and Peter and Christ on the water, and on the lower part of the wall are the three women at the tomb which is depicted as a sarcophagus with a star: a reminder of the link between baptism and the Resurrection - between Easter morning and the birth to new life achieved in baptism.

The Healed Paralytic is found also in the catacomb of Calixtus in the Sacrament Chapel A3<sup>I4</sup>. In receiving the ability to walk the paralytic received also forgiveness of his sins, which is what is achieved in baptism. Other baptismal illustrations are found in the Sacrament Chapel A2, and in the Crypts of Lucina in the oldest part of the Catacomb of Calixtus. The technical term applied to a person about to be baptised was "infans", and the candidate is, therefore, depicted as a child, with the Holy Spirit shown in the form of a dove<sup>I5</sup>.

At Dura Europos, on the right of the Healed Paralytic is the fresco of Jesus saving Peter from the water<sup>I6</sup>. This association of Peter on the water with baptism is today retained in the Roman Catholic rite of baptism:

"Qui Petro mergenti dextram porrexit".

Also in the Roman Catholic rite are to be found elements of the baptismal rite of Hippolytus, who was coming to the end of his life at around the same time as Christians were worshipping and being baptised at the House Church in Dura Europos.

The works of Hippolytus are both the starting and the finishing points of this study, for they provide us with the record of a well-developed baptismal liturgy, many elements of which can still be found in modern rites, but which are not to be found in New Testament sources. The scene for this work is thus set by the first two chapters. The first chapter, on the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, shows how far the rite had developed within the first two hundred years of the Church's life. The second chapter, on baptism in the New Testament demonstrates the considerable difference between the New Testament practices and that described by Hippolytus around two hundred years later. It is then possible to begin the search for the origins and development of the Christian baptismal practice to the time of the writing of the Apostolic Tradition, around 230AD.

In tracing this course of development a number of sources have been considered which have not been cited in previous baptismal works: Mandaean, Gnostic and Manichaeian. Study of the rites and practices of such as these affects the way in which more traditional sources are treated and results in a form of discussion not yet raised even in so vast a field of writing.

## NOTES

- I. J. Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*. London, 1960. *The Origins of Infant Baptism*. London, 1963.
2. Tertullian, *De Baptismo XVIII*. 3-6. Ed. A. Reifferscheid and G. Wissowa. *C.S.E.L. XX I*. p. 215.
3. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio 40*. 17, 23, 28. Migne, PG. 36.
4. *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*. p. 98.
5. *ibid.* p. 48.
6. *ibid.* p. 50.
7. *ibid.* p. 55.
8. *The Origins of Infant Baptism*. p. 12f.
9. *ibid.* p. 33f.
10. *ibid.* p. 64f.
- II. G.W.H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*. London, 1967.
12. *ibid.* p. 322.
13. See K.S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*. London, 1951, and C.F. Moore, *History of Religion*. New York, 1913-1919 (2 vols.). More recently, W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*. Oxford, 1965.
14. F. Van Der Meer and C. Mohrmann, *Atlas of the Christian World*. London, 1958. p. 42, plate 50, and at *Dura Europos*, plates 52 and 72.
15. *ibid.* p. 42, plates 48 and 49.
16. *ibid.* p. 42, plate 51.

\* Those who do not live in anything approaching urban communities.

I

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY

I.

THE BAPTISMAL RITE OF HIPPOLYTUS

The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus was written around 220AD., and provides what it claims to be an authoritative account of the rites and organisation of the Church as it had received them during the late second century from the sub-apostolic age. It is important to note that the purpose of the work was not to introduce new developments, rather, it claims to record those rites and customs which already form part of the tradition of the Church, and it also expresses disapproval of change which has been taking place.

The Tradition can be divided into three main sections:

- i) The process of ordaining, or setting apart, of those who are to hold positions within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, along with a brief resumé of their functions.
- ii) The process of admitting new members to the Church.
- iii) A moral code for Christians.

#### The Life of Hippolytus

Very little is known about Hippolytus himself. He was probably born before 170AD. since his works were being published by around 195AD., and it is possible that his birth was as early as 155-60AD. as he himself states that he was born at approximately the same time as Callistus, who was to become Bishop of Rome.

Callistus was a Christian slave born in the household of Carpophorus, a wealthy Christian freedman of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. He misappropriated some of his master's money and when trying to recover it was discovered to be

a Christian. He was sent to the Sardinian mines from which he was released through the intervention of one of the Emperor's concubines. This meant that he was also a free man. There is, in fact, very little information about Callistus apart from what Hippolytus wrote, which demonstrates his severe resentment of Callistus. He writes mainly about the "Decree of Penance" to which he and Tertullian strongly objected but which was supported by Callistus. The Decree permitted those who had sinned after baptism to do penance in the hope of receiving forgiveness. Callistus also permitted marriage between free born women and slaves. Roman law would not give full recognition to any marriage involving a slave, whereas the Church allowed the marriage of free born men to women slaves, so that Callistus was merely giving the same right to free born women. Hippolytus opposed this also. On the whole, Hippolytus shows himself to be narrow minded and obstinate - not the kind of person to innovate or reform.

#### Gnosticism

Gnosticism had almost split the Church in the previous century. The Gnostic concept was one of a remote Godhead which was very impersonal and which could never have any direct contact with the material world.

Orthodoxy reacted by insisting on the unique and perfect nature of God, thus raising the problem of the relationship between the Incarnate and Transcendent God. A common solution was to state that they were without

qualification one and the same; that within the divine "Monarchie" there can be no real distinction at all. These kinds of statement were, however, too sweeping.

Hippolytus put forward another view and, true to character, the view he offered was one which Justin Martyr had given in Rome about fifty years before and which had since been widely accepted by the Church. He said that the unique divine nature was capable of real distinction within itself: God had always possessed within himself the Logos; at a certain point in time God manifested the Word or Logos, and through this created all things. Thus the Word was truly God, within and of the one divine nature, but Another over and against the Father. Hippolytus refused to apply the term "Son", maintaining that the title was applied only allegorically to the Word by God. The Word BECAME the Son at the Incarnation. This left no room for the Holy Spirit, although he does refer to the Spirit, and the Logos appears to be an impersonal divine attribute. This view is very similar to that of the Arians and the Macedonians who denied the divinity of the Spirit ("Macedonianism" \* was, at this time, widely accepted by the Church). However, a dispute developed between Hippolytus and the Monarchians during the pontificate of Zephyrinus. Hippolytus claimed that Callistus was the real leader of the Monarchians, though he would not admit it, and he also claimed that Zephyrinus supported them because he had been bribed by his Archdeacon, Callistus. Zephyrinus' ruling seems to have been a genuine attempt to make a balanced statement. However, Hippolytus refused to see it in this light, even though

the Monarchians, at least at the time, appeared to accept the papal ruling. He launched a public attack on the Pope and could not, therefore, be allowed to remain in Rome.

The traditional view of Hippolytus is that he was a Roman presbyter who aspired to the position of bishop and who was thwarted in this ambition in 217 by Callistus who in that year became Bishop of Rome. Thereafter, he became an anti-pope and later was exiled with Pope Pontian (for a fuller discussion of this see W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution* p. 342, note 166). It is possible that Hippolytus managed to have himself recognised as Bishop of Rome by some of his followers after the death of Zephyrinus, but his claim seems to have been rejected by almost everyone and his following was probably limited to a small group of personal disciples. All of this had little effect on the Church and made no contribution to the schism which took place later in the century. He was not the only anti-pope in his own lifetime and he was not a very important one; in all probability leaving no successor. His schism with the Roman Church probably lasted from around 217 to 235AD.; the survival of some of his writings is due to their following a mainly orthodox line, despite their author's schismatic behaviour, and the Church historians know little about him <sup>1</sup>.

#### The Apostolic Tradition

This work is generally regarded as an attack on Callistus soon after his accession in 217, but it may have been



published in the later years of Zephyrinus:

- a) Hippolytus nowhere claims to be bishop and, indeed, writes as if he is addressing the one who is at the head of the Church hierarchy;
- b) he slights the deacons in the course of setting out their duties (possibly with Callistus, the Archdeacon,<sup>\*\*</sup> in mind at the time), while enhancing the position of the presbyters;
- c) he suggests that the administration of the cemetery is not what it might be, and this again is probably an attack on Callistus who was its first administrator and was almost certainly still in charge of it when Hippolytus was writing;
- d) in his later work, the Philosophumena, he attacks the changes which Callistus had introduced, but there is no mention of these in the Tradition.

The only suggestion that Callistus might have been bishop at this time is the reference to the marriage of free women to slaves. The date, therefore, should possibly be put at around 215AD., during the pontificate of Zephyrinus. If this dating is correct, Hippolytus would not yet be leader of a schismatic group which might have had some distinct practices of its own, so that his account is all the more likely to be that of the strictly orthodox rites and forms of the Catholic Church in Rome. Yet, how certain can we be that Hippolytus is not describing the practices of his own schismatic group? How traditional are the rites and forms which he describes and to what extent do they represent normal

practice in the second and early third centuries ? On the whole, Hippolytus agrees in his descriptions with earlier and later writers, such as Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Justin, and others including Tertullian.

There are also several other factors which help confirm the validity of his records:

- a) at the time of writing the Tradition, Hippolytus was in all probability still a presbyter and as such he was attacking the new and defending the old. The image his work projects of him is that of a traditionalist, and he probably is in fact recording the old Roman customs and regulations as he claims. The practices he describes were quite possibly those in use before the time of writing, and may well have been almost obsolete.
- b) His other writings show him to be narrow minded and with a tendency towards exaggeration, as had so many of his contemporaries, but the basic facts were usually accurate though his interpretations of them may be dubious. Therefore, he does not seem to have been guilty of intentional falsification.
- c) In later writers and in later Roman liturgies it is possible to see the alteration and development of much that Hippolytus records gradually taking place: the later Roman rite of baptism, for example, is clearly based on a rite very similar to that described in the Apostolic Tradition XX - XXIII. The same baptismal rite is found in the Valentinian Gnostic writers quoted by Clement of Alexandria, and this evidence is older than the Apostolic

Tradition by at least one generation. His account is thus of a rite already well known both within the Roman Church and outside of it.

During the remainder of the third century and for three quarters of the next the Apostolic Tradition disappears. Traces of it are to be found in the Syrian Apostolic Constitutions (c.375AD.), and in the Testament of our Lord (c. 400AD.), with possible reference to it by Jerome. It is later incorporated into the Egyptian Sahidic Heptateuch which is not older than fifth century. Also to be found in the fifth and sixth centuries are the Epitome of the Apostolic Constitutions VIII, and the Canons of Hippolytus.

All of these documents originated in Syria or Egypt and it was also in this area that the "Church Orders" were innovated. This was a collection of writings whose primary concern was with liturgy and Church order, and had the Apostolic Tradition not been included in this collection it is unlikely that it would have survived. It is, perhaps, ironic that the modern Roman rite of baptism<sup>2</sup> should include so many practices similar to those of the rite recorded in the Apostolic Tradition, a document so quickly forgotten, or rejected, in Rome, its place of origin, and owing its survival to Syria and Egypt. It is a strange twist of historical chance that has left to Hippolytus, the rather bigotted anti-Pope, the task of recording the rites and orders of the orthodox Church of his time. It is odd that the work of so unimportant and vague a character

as Hippolytus should form the pivotal point in a discussion of the Church's sacrament of Baptism. Yet, here we find drawn together the practices and forms which the Church and splinter groups had employed in the course of the previous two centuries, and from here we can trace the development of the rite into the various forms it took in later centuries, even to the present day.

The rite of Hippolytus cannot possibly be described as the origin of the modern baptismal rite. However, if one can trace the development and perhaps find the origins of the various elements, forms, practices, of this rite, this information will provide a fairly clear and possibly a surprising background to our own baptismal practices today.

#### Baptism in the Apostolic Tradition

The following is a break-down of the regulations and order for the administration of the baptismal rite as set down by Hippolytus. The text used for this is the translation of Gregory Dix<sup>++</sup> and the numbering of sections employed here corresponds with those in his text.

#### XVI

##### 1. Examination of convert.

- a) His reason for coming to the faith is examined.
- b) The sponsors must testify as to his suitability to hear the Word.
- c) Enquiry is made into his way of life; into whether

or not he has a wife; into whether he is a slave or free.

d) If he is a slave he must have his master's permission.

e) Enquiry is made into the occupation of the candidate.

Teachers, charioteers, public servants, and others are not acceptable unless they change their profession.

## XVII

2. The catechumenate.

This was a period of instruction over a period of three years, although the period could be shorter if the person was "earnest".

## XVIII

a) Catechumens pray apart from the faithful, and women pray apart from the men.

b) They only embrace one another and do not give or receive the "kiss of peace". Men embrace men and women embrace women.

c) The women are required to cover their heads at prayer.

## XIX

d) After the prayer at the end of the lesson the teacher dismisses the catechumens by the laying on of hands.

e) It is asserted that any catechumen who is martyred before the administration of the baptismal rite is, nevertheless, baptised - in his own blood.

## XX

3. Prebaptismal preparation.

a) The Scrutiny: an examination of the life of the candidate, with those who sponsor them for baptism bearing witness to this. If this proves satisfactory they are allowed to hear the gospel.

b) Exorcisms: a hand is laid on the candidates and they are exorcised every day from the day they are set apart for baptism. Before the baptism itself, each is exorcised by the bishop.

c) On the Thursday of Holy Week the candidates bathe themselves.

d) On Friday and Saturday:

- i) They fast;
- ii) the bishop assembles them all and they pray and "bend the knee" (confession).
- iii) the bishop lays his hand on them and exorcises them
- iv) the bishop breathes on their faces and seals their foreheads, ears and noses, then raises them up.

4. The paschal vigil.

a) Saturday night is spent in reading the scriptures.

b) Only that which is to be offered at the Eucharist is to be brought by the catechumens. (This presumably means that the fast begun on the Friday continues through Saturday night also.)

XXI

5. The baptismal rite.

a) At dawn, prayers are said over the water (which must be flowing).

b) The candidates remove their clothes.

c) The children are baptised first, and if they are too young to answer for themselves their parents, or a family member, answer for them. Men are baptised next and then women, who must remove ornaments and loosen their hair.

d) The bishop consecrates the Oil of Thanksgiving and exorcises other oil which is the Oil of Exorcism.

e) Then there is the renunciation by the candidates of

Satan and all his works.

f) The presbyter anoints the candidate with the Oil of Exorcism.

g) The same presbyter turns him to the East and the candidate "consents" to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and prays: "Grant me to do all your wills without blame".

h) The candidate is then handed over to the presbyter who will baptise and who turns him to the East at the edge of the water, the candidate saying:

"I believe and bow myself to you and all your service, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit".

i) The candidate goes down into the water and stands in the water naked and a deacon does likewise.

j) A form of creed is spoken by the deacon and the candidate replies: "Truly, I believe".

k) Another creed is spoken by the deacon (very similar to the Apostles' Creed) which is put to the candidate in the form of three questions, and after he has responded to one question he is immersed, then another question is put to which he replies and is immersed, and likewise a third time. Baptism is administered with the deacon's hand on the candidate's head.

l) The candidate comes out of the water and is anointed with the Oil of Thanksgiving.

m) They dry themselves, put on their clothes, and then join the assembled congregation.

XXII

## 6. Confirmation

a) The bishop lays his hand on each candidate and prays for regeneration, filling with the Holy Spirit, and grace.

- b) He anoints them with holy oil in the name of the Trinity (i.e. he anoints their heads).
- c) He seals each candidate on the forehead and gives him the kiss of peace, the bishop saying: "The Lord be with you", and the candidate replying: "And with your spirit".
- d) The candidates join the prayers of the faithful for the first time.
- e) They give and receive the kiss of peace.

### XXIII

#### 7. The paschal Mass.

- a) Bread and wine is brought in by the deacons and blessed by the bishop.
- b) Milk and honey are also offered, and water, after which the bishop explains them.
- c) The bishop breaks the bread and as he distributes the pieces he says: "The bread of heaven in Christ Jesus", and the reply is given: "Amen".
- d) Presbyters hold the three cups: water, milk, wine, and each cup is drunk from in turn.

Hippolytus then adds the injunction to do good works, please God, live righteously, devote oneself to the Church, and to practise what one has learned: "advancing in the service of God".

#### Analysis

The following is a very brief examination of part of the rite noting similarities to the rites of sects and documents which will be dealt with later in this paper.



- i) "Pray over the water." The practice of praying over the water is found in Mandaean literature. Although it is possible that this was an addition from Christianity it seems unlikely that this would have been omitted in a rite which places so much emphasis on the power of words.
- ii) "Let the water be pure and flowing." The "jordans" (baptismal streams) of Mandaeism had to be such, as did the baptismal water of the Didache except in exceptional circumstances.
- iii) The specification that the bishop is authoritative throughout the rite places the Christian bishop in a position very similar to that of the Mandaean priest, and is a much more developed concept than in Didache, coming closer to the highly ordered Church described by Ignatius.
- iv) Anointing with the oil of exorcism: in the Gnostic sects which employ sacraments at all anointing is usually more important than the actual baptism in water, holding the view that the anointing completes the "mystery"<sup>3</sup>. Also, there is a close resemblance between the anointing described here and that which is found in the account of the baptism of Mygdonia given in the Gnostic Acts of Thomas which instructs:
- "Anoint with the oil of exorcism saying:  
'Let all evil spirits depart from you'". 4
- v) The triple immersion set down by Hippolytus is found also in the Mandaean rite and the use of a set formula of words is there too.
- vi) The oil of thanksgiving, which is the anointing given when the candidate comes out of the water, is

similar to the Mandaean post baptismal practice which takes place on the bank of the river or pool where the baptisms have taken place.

### XXIII (Confirmation)

This part of the rite comprises various elements: the Laying on of Hands, Anointing, Sealing, the Kiss of Peace, all of which are to be found in other descriptions of baptismal practices.

The Laying on of Hands, for example, is part of the Mandaean rite and takes place while the recipient is still in the water. It is also described in the Acts of Thomas as well as forming part of the Valentinian practice.

The Anointing in Mandaeism is received on the river bank and is followed by the sacrament of bread and water. It is included in the description provided by the Acts of Thomas, as is Sealing, which follows the bread and water sacrament of the Mandaeans after the Kiss of Peace has been given.

### XXIII

- i) The eucharist follows immediately on baptism. The bread and the cup of wine mixed with water is not unlike the sacrament of the Mandaeans and is exactly the same as that found in the gnostic Acts of Thomas, although milk and honey do not appear to have been used in the gnostic rite.
- ii) The drinking of water forms part of the rite of Hippolytus as in the Mandaean and gnostic rites: the Mandaean drinks water three times while still in the water of baptism; in the Acts of Thomas bread and water are given to the candidate. In the rite described by the Tradition, water is given "that the inner man also, which

is psychic, may receive the same as the body". By baptism, which includes the drinking of the water, the Mandaean believe that a share of salvation is bestowed, and also an outer and inner cleansing from sin, and according to Thomas, Mygdonia, having received the rite, can now create for herself eternal life.<sup>6</sup> In all of these rites the total effect can only be achieved when water had been experienced internally as well as externally.

XXXVII (The sign of the cross)

i) "And when tempted, always reverently seal your forehead (with the sign of the cross). For this sign of the Passion is displayed and made manifest against the devil if you make it in faith....." In the Acts of Thomas sealing is in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

ii) "If indeed the adversary seeing the power of the Spirit outwardly displayed in the image of baptism he does not take to flight trembling.....

Wherefore, sealing the forehead and the eyes with the hand we shall escape him who seeks to destroy us."

The Acts of Thomas records the sealing of a woman<sup>8</sup>

for this very reason, and the effect of the Mandaean rite is similar:

"Every person who is marked with the 'sign of Life' and over whom the name of the King of Light is pronounced, and (every person) who is firm and steadfast in (or: Through) baptism and performs good and pleasing deeds, will not be impeded by anyone on his way (to the place of light)".<sup>9</sup>

At this stage, all of this is somewhat vague, but it

does help demonstrate that the rite of Hippolytus, which is the rite of the orthodox Church of that period of history, is by no means unique either in its forms and practices or in its interpretation of these. It could, however, be said that this is true only of the baptismal rite of Hippolytus and not of the rite of the orthodox Church as a whole. The following summary of Tertullian's understanding of the baptismal practice should help to overcome any such objection, for it can be seen from this that the rite known to Tertullian is basically the same as that recorded by Hippolytus.

Tertullian: "On Baptism"

Like the gnostics and the Mandaeans, Tertullian believes that the water of baptism washes away all past sins, admits one to eternal life, and also that it gives re-birth.<sup>10</sup> He does not give a detailed account of the actual method of administering the rite, being more concerned with interpreting the meaning of the rite than with describing its forms. He does, however, say that it is a simple act and it may be that this indicates that the rite known to Tertullian was simpler than that which Hippolytus describes, although the basic practice is the same.<sup>11</sup> Another difference between the two is Tertullian's indifference to the kind of water used for baptisms. As the Holy Spirit first hovered over the waters of Chaos, so it still hovers over the waters of baptism and because the Spirit sanctifies the water, the water in turn gains the power

to sanctify be it "a sea or a pool, a stream or a font, a lake or a trough".<sup>12</sup> This difference moves Tertullian's rite a little away from the Mandaeen rite which places such great emphasis on the necessity that the water be 'flowing'. On the other hand, however, he comes closer to the gnostic interpretation of the baptismal rite than does Hippolytus, for Tertullian states quite clearly<sup>13</sup> that the Holy Spirit is not received in the water of baptism: in the water one is prepared for the receiving of the Spirit. This places greater importance upon the anointing, as does gnostic belief, along with the laying on of hands which is accompanied by a benediction calling upon the Holy Spirit. Tertullian likens this practice of the laying on of hands to the descent of the dove upon Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan.<sup>14</sup> He also says of the laying on of hands that it unites the cleansed body with the spirit. In gnosticism there is a mysterious rite, and possibly a sacrament, known as "the Bridal Chamber". Nowhere in gnostic documents is this explained and it is, therefore, impossible to say with any certainty what this rite consisted of or what it was believed to achieve. Tertullian's understanding of the laying on of hands, however, could be similar to the significance attached to the gnostic bridal chamber:

"Shall it be granted possible for human ingenuity to summon a spirit into water, and, by the application of hands from above, to animate their union into one body with another spirit of so clear sound; and shall it not be possible for God in the case of his own organ, to produce by means of "holy hands", a sublime spiritual modulation ?" <sup>15</sup>

Hippolytus would have agreed with Tertullian's statement that the devil is overwhelmed in the water,<sup>16</sup> and that baptism is once-for-all because once sins have been washed away they should never be repeated: an issue which formed part of the quarrel with Callistus.<sup>17</sup> As in the rite of Hippolytus, the bishop is the principal administrator, although presbyters and deacons who have been authorised by the bishop can also administer the rite.<sup>18</sup> In both rites, candidates require sponsors who will testify to their suitability for baptism; in both they must pray, fast, "bend the knee", and spend the night before their baptism in vigil; all past sins must be confessed and after baptism they are expected to live according to standards acceptable to the Church.<sup>19</sup> A point of disagreement would probably have been Tertullian's preference for the rite to be delayed<sup>20</sup> rather than entered into hastily, especially "in the case of little children". Hippolytus makes allowance for the baptism of children, even those who are not yet able to speak for themselves, and although his rite is clearly designed for adults he does not advise against the baptism of children.

It is possible to extract from a variety of Tertullian's works an order for the baptism itself:

- a) Profession of faith is made in the water, in the course of which the candidate states that he renounces the "devil, his retinue, and his works".<sup>21</sup>
- b) The candidate is immersed three times: once for each name of the Trinity while being interrogated and

answering the questions put by the administrator. <sup>22</sup>

c) Immediately after baptism there is a signing, or anointing, with oil, and an imposition of the hand. <sup>23</sup>

d) The newly baptised are welcomed into the assembly, and in the course of the eucharist are given milk and honey to drink. <sup>24</sup>

e) For a week afterwards they do not bathe. <sup>25</sup>

Although this order is not as detailed as that supplied by Hippolytus it is sufficient to show that there are no radical disagreements between the two.

Hippolytus himself is well aware that baptismal rites were administered by groups outwith the Christian community, for in his "Refutation of all Heresies" he records a considerable amount of information about one such group called the Essenes: a Jewish baptist sect of which the Qumran community has been said to have been a part.

## NOTES

1. In his *Apostolic Fathers* (Clement of Rome I p. 328. London 1890), Lightfoot quotes two notices from the *Liberian Chronographer* (354 AD.):

a) the *Liberian Catalogue of the Popes* (which Lightfoot dates from about 255 AD, and which would thus supply near-contemporary evidence of Hippolytus):

"At that time Pontian, bishop, and Hippolytus the Presbyter were banished and deported to the unhealthy island of Sardinia in the Consulship of Severus and Quintian (235). In that same island Pontian resigned on 28th. September and in his place Antheros was ordained on the 21st. November in the aforesaid Consulship".

b) The *Depositio Martyrum* ( a record of the Roman martyrs compiled not later than 335AD., and which probably employs third century sources) :

"On August 13th.: (Commemoration) of Hippolytus in (the cemetery on the Via) Tiburtina and of Pontianus in (that) of Callistus".

The *Liber Pontificalis* ( ed. L. Duchesne, Paris 1886. I. pp. 64, 145), dates to around 530AD., but employs third and fourth century sources. It records that Saint Fabian (236-250AD.) accompanied by his clergy brought back the body of Saint Pontian in a ship from Sardinia and buried it in the cemetery of Callistus. There is no mention here of Hippolytus, but the fact that the "depositio" of both was celebrated on the same day, within a century of their deaths seems to indicate that the body of Hippolytus was also brought back. Pontian was placed in the "Crypt of the Popes" in the cemetery of Callistus, and Hippolytus was buried in the *Ager Veranus* on the road to Tiber, which became quite a cult centre

Also quoted by Lightfoot (*Clement of Rome I* pp. 328,329) is an inscription erected by Pope Damasus at the tomb of Hippolytus between 366 and 384AD. By that time Hippolytus appears to have been regarded as a martyr: the inscription says that "Hippolytus presbyter" (not "bishop", which claim seems to have been forgotten), is said to have supported the Novatian schism and was executed. On his way to execution, however, he told his followers to return to the Catholic Church, and thus merits his position as a martyr. Damasus adds to this that he is only repeating what information he himself has received, and therefore does not seem altogether convinced by it.

Hippolytus died about ten years before the beginning of Novatianism, so that the inscription cannot be accurate, although the reputed reconciliation with his opponents is a possibility. (See, for instance, Diehl *ILCV* 1831 where he is associated as a martyr with Pope Xystus and the Roman martyr Laurentius,) on a North African inscription



(Ain Zirara).

The Inscriptio in Caemetario Hippolyti, with other inscriptions, are described by G.B. De Rossi in *Bulletino di Archeologia Cristiana* VI, 1881. p. 5f.

2. See Appendix I for order of Hippolytean rite.
3. Refutation V 9. 22. Ed. P. Wendland, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* 3. Leipzig, 1916. p. 102.
4. Acts of Thomas 10:121 (cf. 5:49). Ed. A.F.J. Klijn. Leiden, 1962. p. 130 . (See p. 159 below)
5. *ibid.* 10:121.
6. *ibid.* 5:49. Klijn p. 90 (cf. 2:26, 27; and below, p. 153, 154 )
7. See Acts of Thomas 2:27 and 10:121. Klijn p. 78 and p. 130 (below, p. 153, 159 ).
8. *ibid.* 5:49. Klijn p. 90 (below, p. 157, 158 ).
9. GR. I. 123-4 (See W. Foerster, *Gnosis*. Oxford, 1974. vol. 2, p. 277).
10. *De Baptismo*. Tertullian, ed. A. Reifferscheid and W. Wissowa, C.S.E.L. XX I, Vienna, 1890. p. 201-218.
11. *De Baptismo* II. C.S.E.L. XX I. p. 201-202.
12. *De Baptismo* IV. *ibid.* p. 203-204.
13. *De Baptismo* VI. *ibid.* p. 206.
14. *De Baptismo* VIII. *ibid.* p. 207-208.
15. *De Baptismo* VIII. *ibid.* p. 207-208.
16. *De Baptismo* IX. *ibid.* p. 208.
17. *De Baptismo* XV. *ibid.* p. 213-214.
18. *De Baptismo* XVII. *ibid.* p. 214.
19. *De Baptismo* XVIII and XX. *ibid.* p. 215, 216, and 217, 218.
20. *De Baptismo* XVIII. *ibid.* p. 215, 216.
21. *De Spectaculis* IV. Ed. A. Reifferscheid and G. Wissowa, C.S.E.L. XXI, p. 6. *De Corona* III. Ed. A. Kroymann, C.S.E.L. 70. Leipzig, 1942. p. 157, 158.
22. *De Corona* III. C.S.E.L. 70. p. 157, 158.
23. *De Carnis Resurrectione* VIII. Ed. A. Kroymann, C.S.E.L. XLVII. Vienna, 1890. p. 36, 37.

24. De Corona III. C.S.E.L. LXX. P. I57, I58.

25. *ibid.*

\*

The name "Macedonians" did not come into use until after 380AD. See, J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, London, 1965. p. 295f.

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Gregory Dix, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*. London 1968.

Dix cites R.H. Connolly's "The So-Called Egyptian Church Order and Derived Documents" (Cambridge Texts and Studies viii 4, 1916), and E. Schwartz, *Ueber die pseudo-apostolischen Kirchenordnungen* (Schriften der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft in Strassburg vi, 1910) to support his statement that the Apostolic Tradition was issued in Rome between 210 and 220 by the anti-pope Hippolytus.

Dix's observation (p. xi) would support my own conclusions that the rites and practices of Hippolytus are in fact the traditional, long established rites and practices of the Church, and that the Tradition was compiled in opposition to change rather than as an introduction to changes which he proposed to make. Dix would place Hippolytus still in Rome, although already withdrawn and isolated from the Church after the dogmatic dispute with Zephyrinus, until Zephyrinus' death when it became clear that Callistus would succeed him. Hippolytus then appears to have had himself recognised as bishop by his own followers. Dix would date the schism as lasting from c. 217-235 (p. xxviii) - probably beginning shortly after the writing of the Apostolic Tradition which he would date before the accession of Callistus in 217, during the latter end of the reign of Zephyrinus (p. xxxvii). Hippolytus would then still be part of the orthodox Church in Rome and would be stating the practice of it and not of his own schismatic group which would not yet have been in existence.

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I have chosen to use Dix's translation at this point mainly because of a personal preference for the layout and language of the work, but also because it was the most recent English translation available.

\*\* It is unlikely that the term "Archdeacon" was known at this point in the history of the Church and it would probably be more accurate to speak of the "senior" deacon.

2.

THE QUESTION OF BAPTISM  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The baptismal rite as recorded in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus developed out of two hundred years of Christianity and left its mark upon the rite as it continued to develop through the next seventeen hundred years. So where do the origins of this rite lie? Are they to be found in the New Testament; are even traces of them to be found there? At this stage it is tempting to launch into a study of baptism in the New Testament but to enter into a detailed study would necessarily mean duplicating work which has already been very thoroughly done. It would, also, be extremely difficult to deal adequately with the subject unless one were concentrating solely on the area of New Testament study, for as J.D.G. Dunn points out, the New Testament cannot be treated as an homogeneous whole and, therefore, any reference has to be placed within the context of the author's writing and thought as a whole before it can be considered along with references from the work of other writers <sup>1</sup>. To give such treatment of the New Testament references to baptism would result in repetition of the work done by experts such as G.R. Beasley Murray <sup>2</sup>, and there would still remain questions concerning what the New Testament writers really understood by "baptism", and how much of this understanding comes from Jesus himself and how much from the thought and practice of the Church of their own time or from that of later editors.

An examination of the New Testament references to baptism and of its apparent understanding of the rite, or, at least,

of the understanding of its various authors, shows the issue of baptism in the New Testament to be a very complex one: an issue in fact which may be clarified by study of the New Testament texts but which cannot be totally resolved. For instance, Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50 speak of the passion of Jesus as a "baptism" into suffering and death. Only these two sayings refer to Jesus' death as a baptism, and for Cullmann<sup>3</sup> they demonstrate Jesus' view of his baptism as a consecration to death. There is considerable support for this opinion<sup>4</sup> and A. Richardson takes it further,<sup>5</sup> holding that since Mark and Luke use the technical term for baptism they were stating what they believed to be Jesus' own teaching regarding the baptism administered by the Church, which was a baptism into the death of Jesus. The problem with this theory is that if these words came from the mouth of Jesus they could not refer to the Church's baptismal rite since it did not yet exist, and if they are the words of Mark and Luke themselves it is very unlikely that they would have had such a complex understanding of a rite which would, at the time they were writing, still be at an early stage in its development.

Whatever the exact original meaning and whoever was the speaker of these words, BAPTIZEIN is clearly not limited to water baptism. Jesus had already been baptised yet there is another baptism to come: one from which he cannot withdraw, and there is no record of another water baptism. This seems to indicate that we should not always think of water when we meet with BAPTIZEIN in the New

Testament. Rather, baptism here appears to be equated with drinking the cup. In the Old Testament the concept of the cup is the "cup of wrath" and also the "cup of salvation", and drinking the cup would be accepting the judgement and forgiveness of God. If, therefore, drinking the cup equals baptism, then baptism could equal acceptance of the judgement and forgiveness of God. Who, however, made this equation, whether Jesus himself or Mark or Luke, is now impossible to determine. All that can be said is that the idea was known, at least to the gospel writers and quite possibly to Christians in general, at the time the two gospels were written. <sup>6</sup>

Then there are Mark 16:15f., which does not belong to Mark's gospel at all but is probably a second century addition, and Matthew 28:19, <sup>7</sup> which is certainly from the hand of the writer and not from the mouth of Jesus:

a) Trinitarian baptism is not found until the rite recorded in the Didache which could be dated to around the time of the writing of Matthew's gospel, but which is definitely later than Mark;

b) the mission to the Gentiles is only recognised by the Jerusalem Church when Paul put the case to it, and in making his case he is not recorded as having made any appeal to a command of Jesus relating directly to this.

Had Paul known of this command as found in these two passages we must assume that he would have referred to it;

c) 1 Corinthians 1:17: "For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel".

Had Jesus commissioned his original disciples to baptise, Paul, in claiming to be an Apostle, would have to have

seen baptism as a major part of his mission as well as teaching the nations.

So far, therefore, it seems unlikely that any direct command of Jesus to baptise was known either to Paul or to the early Church<sup>8</sup>. Yet both Paul and Acts show baptism as being generally practised, and from their references to it there seems to have been little objection to the practice.

It is possible that baptism in the early Church was a revival of the rite of John the Baptist<sup>9</sup>:

- a) John believed that the end was imminent, and so did the early Church;
- b) John believed that the end would begin with the coming of the Messiah, and the early Church believed that the end would come with the return of the Messiah, with the return of Jesus;
- c) John's ethical demands were similar to some of those made in Jesus' own teaching;
- d) by John's baptism people became a part of the remnant of Israel which would be saved because it was prepared for the future judgement. The Church saw itself as the New Israel, also prepared for the coming judgement.

There is, however, no direct evidence that the Christian rite did develop from John's rite, although such development would help explain why the water rite was so readily accepted, but the question mark must remain.

The Pauline literature, too, leaves us with unanswered questions, as in Galatians 3:27:



"For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ".

Does this sentence infer that it is in baptism itself that the believer puts himself into Christ's position (ie. "puts on Christ"), or when read in conjunction with verse 26:

"For in Christ you are all sons of God, through faith", is it "faith" which makes one a son of God, not baptism? It would seem that any divine intervention or presence during the baptismal rite would be because of the faith of the believers which had brought them to baptism: there must always be faith as well as the outward rite. In the end, however, can we ever be absolutely certain that this was the view of Paul himself or of the Church of his time? James Dunn believes that BAPTIZEIN EIS CHRISTON is a metaphor from the rite of water baptism used to speak of the incorporation of the believer into Christ <sup>10</sup>, while ENDUSASTHAI CHRISTON is a metaphor taken from Hebrew tradition <sup>11</sup> where changing clothes represents an inward spiritual change, as in Isaiah 61:10 and Zechariah 3:3f. <sup>12</sup> Dunn believes that this is no more a reference to water baptism than are the references in Romans, Colossians and Ephesians. "To put on Christ" is simply a figurative usage to describe more expressively the spiritual transformation which makes one a Christian. It neither describes the ritual, nor does it say that a ritual act had this spiritual effect.' <sup>13</sup> Dunn goes on to point out, however, that Paul did not see baptism as an empty symbol, but that his frequent metaphorical use of it demonstrates that he regarded the water rite as an important element in the faith-experience and

initiation of his readers, and appears to indicate that baptism is an important method of expressing this faith <sup>14</sup>.

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul says:

"For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body....  
..... and all were made to drink of one Spirit".

If BAPTIZEIN can have a wider meaning than merely water baptism, then does baptism by the Spirit necessarily refer to a receiving of the Spirit upon immersion into water or could it be the influence or change effected by a coming of the Spirit at any point in one's life ? Or does Paul definitely speak of baptism as itself conferring the Holy Spirit ? This is the only passage in Paul's writings where he explicitly speaks of baptism in the Spirit <sup>15</sup>. Dunn <sup>16</sup> says that the most popular view of this passage is that Paul is describing Christian water baptism which conveys the Spirit and which incorporates the person baptised into the Body of Christ, but that BAPTIZEIN does not specify water baptism:

'If it invariably signified immersion in water, even in its metaphorical usage, we would have contradiction in sense in Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 10:2 and here, and tautology in John 1:26, 31. J. Schneider's rendering of 1 Cor. 12:13 as, "In one Spirit were we all (by means of baptism) baptised into one body" (Baptism and Church in the New Testament, ET 1957, 35) betrays his awareness that the verse cannot be presented as a straightforward reference to baptism as it stands, without the addition of some such phrase as he employs'. <sup>17</sup>

He concludes that Paul is here speaking of baptism in the Spirit and not about water baptism at all <sup>18</sup>.

There is also Romans 6:2f.:

"How can we who died to sin still live in it ? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death ? We were buried with him by baptism into death so that as Christ

was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life".

Is Paul saying that the significance of baptism lies in the death of Jesus and that the significance of the death of Jesus lies in baptism? The inference is that it is not baptism but baptism and the death of Jesus which achieves release from sin, the possibility of new life, and all the other benefits which in Paul's opinion are the Christian's, for it appears that for the early Church the two were inseparably linked.

It seems that for Paul union with Christ, the receiving of the Holy Spirit, renewal of life, are real experiences, as is forgiveness of sins. Commitment to Jesus is a real turning point: a break with the past, the beginning of new life. All this is expressed, symbolised and finally arrived at in baptism, but it has already started to happen before the rite of water baptism is administered, for it is in faith that the believer comes for baptism. EIS CHRISTON BAPTIZEIN - the believer is not made to belong to Christ by baptism alone, but in baptism he acknowledges and commits himself totally to this relationship, so that it is through the combination of faith and the act of baptism that the believer is made belong to Christ.

Paul never describes any "rite" of baptism, indeed, he appears to have had very little interest in ritual of any kind. 1 Corinthians 1:14f. shows that if Paul did consider baptism to be essential for the receiving of salvation he recognised that more than a "rite" of

baptism was required, that while baptism is important as part of the initiation of believers, the word, the preaching of the gospel, is more important:

"The word of the cross....., to us who are 19 being saved, is the power of God".

Had he believed that the act of water baptism on its own conveyed salvation we would expect to find the rite given a central position in his writings. Only in 1 Corinthians 12:13 does he seem to connect the gift of the Spirit with baptism, and as has already been noted 20 the reference here is not to water baptism. In Galatians 3:3, Romans 10:17, Ephesians 1:13, it is faith which brings salvation. In Galatians 2:19, 20 the new life that he now has is due to faith in God, as is death to the old life. Justification, forgiveness of sins and the cross are central in Paul's thinking, but a baptismal rite is not explicitly so. Nevertheless, what is clear is that baptism was of sufficient importance for Paul to make frequent and significant metaphorical use of it throughout his writings.

In John's gospel we find Jesus saying that:

"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God". (3:5)

Wendt<sup>21</sup>, Kirsopp Lake<sup>22</sup>, Wellhausen<sup>23</sup>, and Weiss<sup>24</sup> believe that HUDATOS KAI is a later addition. Adoption of this view would certainly prevent any conflict between this statement and the view that Jesus himself had nothing more to do with water baptism after his own baptism by John the Baptist. Beasley Murray and others,<sup>25</sup> however, regard the phrase as integral to the text, and to

exclude it certainly seems to be much more an expedient than a justifiable interpretation. W.F. Howard <sup>26</sup> quotes three major possibilities concerning this reference:

a) HUDATOS KAI is a restatement by John of the original saying of verse 3: "A Johannine gloss to bring the saying of Jesus into harmony with the belief and practice of a later generation". <sup>27</sup>

b) The gospel writer simply assumes that there is an outward rite (ie. water baptism) and therefore stresses the spiritual side which makes baptism worthwhile <sup>28</sup>.

c) EX HUDATOS has tended to be interpreted in the light of current baptismal teaching and such an introduction of baptism destroys the continuity of the argument, whose aim is to explain two different types of birth, not to contrast the baptisms of Jesus and John <sup>29</sup>.

Whatever interpretation is placed on HUDATOS KAI, it cannot be dismissed merely for convenience and if baptism and faith are closely linked in the New Testament the phrase would not be at all out of place here, and if there is the possibility that Jesus himself baptised at any time this would be yet stronger proof that these words do belong in the context in which we find them.

One of the major questions which arises from John's gospel is that of whether Jesus ever did administer the rite of water baptism. The Synoptics do not mention such a practice so that it falls to John's gospel to provide any evidence for this which might exist.

In John 3:22f. the ministries of Jesus and John are shown as running concurrently for a time, and Jesus' ministry

is more successful than John's <sup>30</sup>, for "everybody" (3:26) is going to Jesus for baptism, and in 4:1 the Pharisees have heard that Jesus was baptising more followers than was John. This would indicate a very important baptising ministry of Jesus. John 4:1 records that because of his success Jesus goes from Judaea to Galilee under threat from the Pharisees: a threat which would be all the more immediate if John the Baptist was already in prison. John is not really interested in history but in the Church and her relationship with the Risen Christ, and he could, therefore, be attempting to show the difference between water purifications and Christian baptism <sup>31</sup>, or it could be an attempt to explain the Church's adoption of baptism <sup>32</sup>. Beasley Murray <sup>33</sup>, however, says that his motive is of "secondary importance", and E.K. Lee <sup>34</sup> would regard John 3:22 and John 4:2 as composed of conflicting sources and would not consider it as proof that Jesus himself baptised. J.H. Bernard <sup>35</sup> thought that the redactor was trying to preserve the dignity of Jesus which he considered might be lost if he had baptised. G.H.C. Macgregor <sup>36</sup> believed that the gospel writer wanted to show that Jesus was not a rival to John and was saying that when Jesus saw he was baptising more people than John he went away to Galilee. Bultmann in his commentary on John 4:2 accepts it as a parenthesis written by the gospel writer himself, as would most commentators. C.H. Dodd regards the central feature of 4:1 - 3 as "itinerary" information and as providing a motive for this move: the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was gaining more disciples than John (plus a

negative correction). He believes that the writer may be adapting material that has been handed down to him. Traditional information used by John may include the statement that the move was made because Jesus' work had aroused the attention of the authorities. That he went to Galilee because of this may also have formed part of the tradition or it may have been an intelligent inference by John. The story of this move, however, is broken into by John's editorial material and therefore does not give a clear picture <sup>37</sup>.

There is also the fact of Jesus' own baptism:

- a) Jesus' first public action was to be baptised by John, because John's baptism was "from heaven" (Mk.11:30)<sup>38</sup>.
- b) Jesus was baptised with the people and not instead of them. Therefore, his baptism was not to replace theirs <sup>39</sup>.
- c) Jesus began his work of bringing in the Kingdom with baptism, he did not complete with his own receiving of water baptism what he set out to do. There is no reason why other people should not be baptised that they might enter the Kingdom which is at hand <sup>40</sup>.
- d) Jesus' message in Galilee and John's in Judaea are the same (Mt. 3:2 and 4:17). They called for repentance because God was entering world history. John saw this repentance expressed in baptism. Since Jesus' message appears to have been so close to that of John's it is not impossible that he would have seen an expression of response to it in the same way: baptism <sup>41</sup>.

Barrett <sup>42</sup> and Marsh <sup>43</sup> say it would have been impossible

to suppose that Jesus could forbid others receiving a baptism which he himself received. Beasley Murray <sup>44</sup>, therefore, considers that Jesus baptised or at least authorised baptism during the early part of his ministry, and F.J. Leenhardt <sup>45</sup> believes that the baptisms referred to in John 4:1f. are part of Jesus' ministry which is itself earlier than is apparent from the text. Flemington <sup>46</sup> agrees with Beasley Murray <sup>47</sup> that baptisms by Jesus are not mentioned because they took place before the arrest of John, that is, before the beginning of the Galilean ministry, which is a period not recorded by the Synoptics, but the gospel writers disagree on the timing of John's imprisonment. On the other hand, H.G. Marsh <sup>48</sup> believes that baptism by Jesus' disciples was not limited to the early part of the ministry but that the life of Jesus and his activity was regarded as being of greater significance than any rituals or observances, and so baptismal references are not included, but this would not prevent them influencing Christians who may have known of such rites to adopt the practice of baptism.

The Book of Acts records that at Pentecost three thousand converts were baptised, but there is no mention of the disciples, of Jesus' brothers, or of the women. So could it be that they were the only ones who became and remained Christians without being baptised <sup>49</sup> ?

Dunn <sup>50</sup> provides the answer to this by regarding Pentecost as the watershed of salvation-history for the disciples of Jesus: "What Jordan was to Jesus, Pentecost was to the disciples" <sup>51</sup>. It is the moment at which the New



Covenant, previously involving only Jesus himself, was extended to all who had obeyed his commands. Luke shows Jesus as entering into this new Covenant or Agreement with the descent of the Spirit at his baptism in Jordan (Luke 3:22), and for him Pentecost is the climax of all that began there and is the beginning of the new age of the Spirit <sup>52</sup>. The importance, therefore, lies not in water baptism but in baptism with (ie. the receiving of) the Spirit.

This still leaves the explicit examples of Apollos and the Ephesians, disciples who had not received the Holy Spirit, although Apollos "spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John". Dunn <sup>53</sup> points out that there must have been many people who had made contact with John the Baptist or with Jesus at some time, who had not become permanent followers but who had been moved by what they had experienced to receive baptism from John, and there would be many who had encountered Jesus or his disciples but who had never received any form of baptism at all yet believed what they had heard and seen <sup>54</sup>. The Ephesian "disciples" could well fall into such a category. They were thus believers, followers, MATHĒTAI, but were not of the Christian community (HOI MATHĒTAI)\*because they had not received the Holy Spirit, and it was this that Paul sought to put right when he baptised them. Like the Ephesians, Apollos "knew only the baptism of John", but unlike them he was not re-baptised, because he already possessed the Spirit (Acts 18:25) <sup>55</sup> and so

did not require water baptism, for Pentecost had bestowed the Holy Spirit upon him as upon the disciples themselves. Luke, therefore, appears to be saying that the Ephesians required Christian baptism because they had not received the Spirit (although they had received baptism from John), as did all others who had not experienced Pentecost <sup>56</sup>.

J. Weiss has suggested that the writer of Acts places Christian baptism earlier than it actually happened when he dates it as early as Pentecost <sup>57</sup>, but this is a very unlikely explanation of any apparent inconsistencies which occur in the Pentecost narrative. Another explanation offered <sup>58</sup> is that Acts 1:4 - 2:4 comes from a primitive source which shows John's baptism to have been replaced by Christian baptism and which does not fit into the pattern of the following section of Acts, but few **Scholars** today would accept such a theory. Beasley Murray <sup>59</sup> does not regard the Acts narrative as necessarily inconsistent: the Spirit at Pentecost came upon Jesus' disciples, whereas the people such as those addressed by Peter were a larger, more diverse group. The direct and close relationship between Jesus and the disciples, and their receiving of the Spirit at Pentecost places them in a different category from the others. The Pentecost experience was for them the culmination of their experience of Jesus and of his promises. It thus seems reasonable to assume that those who were not baptised (other than those who received the Spirit at Pentecost) are not themselves representative of an accepted tradition, especially in view of Paul's reaction to the Ephesian "disciples",

but are, rather, representative of possibly large numbers of people who had in some way encountered John or Jesus but who had not experienced Pentecost.

In considering baptism in the New Testament questions have tended to have been raised rather than answered and assumptions made rather than concrete proofs offered. This is due in part to the lack of references to baptism and in part it is due to the difficulty of knowing what the New Testament writers really had in mind when they referred to "baptism". This latter difficulty is underlined when we consider New Testament usage of the words BAPTIZEIN, BAPTISMA.

BAPTIZEIN, BAPTISMA are used:

- a) for the baptism of repentance given by John in the gospels, and in Acts 1:5; 11:16; 19:3f.
- b) For the baptism administered by the disciples of Jesus during his ministry: John 3:22, 26 and 4:1f.
- c) For Christian baptism: Matthew 28:19, (Mark 16:16 ?) and also in Acts and in the writings of Paul.
- d) For Jewish purification rites: Mark 7:4; Luke 11:38.
- e) The verb is used metaphorically for the pouring out of the Spirit and fire at some later time in history, at either Pentecost or the eschaton: Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26f.; Acts 1:5; 11:16.
- f) For the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites: 1 Corinthians 10:2.
- g) For the death of Christ and of the sons of Zebedee: Mark 10:38f.; Luke 12:50<sup>60</sup> (although early Christians

would almost certainly have seen Mark 10:38,39 as a baptismal reference).

In later Christian terminology the idea of "perishing", which may originally have been a connotation of BAPTIZEIN as used in the New Testament, is lost and the meaning becomes, literally or metaphorically, to "immerse", or is used as a synonym of LOUEIN (to wash), or in its purely technical form "to baptise", and the same meanings are possible for the noun BAPTISMA.

F.H. Chase <sup>61</sup> takes the meaning to be "immerse". While J.A. Robinson <sup>62</sup> believes it to be "to cleanse ceremonially in water", and thus almost synonymous with LOUEIN. e. Renē y Oro <sup>63</sup> translates it "to wash", for Jewish customs in Mark 7:4, Luke 11:38, and possibly in Hebrews 9:10, but in all other references in the New Testament it is to "immerse". A. Oepke <sup>64</sup> believes that BAPTIZEIN still has the connotation of "perishing" and that the Christian term does not have this meaning when its application is technical (ie. when the reference is to baptism in water). Fuchs and Gaugler <sup>65</sup> interpreted BAPTIZEIN EIS CHRISTON as "plunge into Christ's death".

BAPTIZEIN (EN) PNEUMATI HAGIŌ (KAI PURI): the verb is used metaphorically for an immersion in Spirit and fire. It thus has its Jewish meaning of "immerse", but also an influence of the technical meaning, "to baptise":<sup>66</sup> the literal and technical going together. In 1 Corinthians 10:2 Paul compares Christian baptism with the crossing

of the Red Sea:

EBAPTISANTO EN TĒ NEPHELĒ KAI TĒ THALASSĒ.

He describes the Exodus events as an allegory of Christian experience <sup>67</sup>, using it to explain what it means for the Christian to be incorporated into Christ. He thus combines the technical term for baptism while still conscious of its more literal usage in the sense of the Israelites being "immersed" in the cloud and sea.

In the New Testament, "immerse" remains part of the meaning of BAPTIZEIN, with only very occasional use of it to refer to an ablution. In Romans 6: 1-14, Paul likens baptism to an immersion into death. He does speak here of baptism but not only of baptism, for he deals also with the concept of death with Christ and of death to sin. BAPTIZESTHAI EIS CHRISTON IĒSOUN does not refer to water baptism (the first reference to water baptism in Romans 6 is v.4: DIA TOU BAPTISMATOS), but to the spiritual fact of death to sin. Baptism symbolises union with Christ's death, and immersion represents a burial <sup>68</sup>. Paul describes the baptismal rite as an immersion, a descent into the tomb and an arising from it. Thus, figuratively speaking, the death of Christ and of the sons of Zebedee, and possibly martyrdom in general, could be called a "baptism", maintaining the idea of "perishing" as part of the New Testament understanding of BAPTIZEIN and possibly influencing the later Church to understand baptism as a leaving off of the old life and the putting on of a new kind of life. This very brief discussion of the meaning of BAPTIZEIN

demonstrates this additional difficulty in considering baptism in the New Testament, for one has to decide upon the meaning of it in any reference: whether it is being used literally, technically or metaphorically.

Although not directly linked with baptism in the New Testament, the practice of the laying on of hands is to be found there and was later to become part of the Christian baptismal rite, then, along with unction, became the rite of "confirmation". It therefore seems appropriate that some mention of it be made at this point.

In the Book of Acts the practice is linked with the gift of the Spirit<sup>69</sup>, but it is hardly mentioned elsewhere. There is a possible reference to it in 2 Timothy 1:6 where it may be interpreted as a laying on of hands after baptism<sup>70</sup>. Paul does not speak of this practice at all, and while this may have been an unintentional oversight it is unlikely, if the laying on of hands had been one of the major elements in Christian baptism and the act by which the Holy Spirit was received, or, at least, with which it was closely associated.

Reference to the laying on of hands as bestowing the Spirit after baptism is infrequent. Didache's description of baptism<sup>71</sup> and Justin Martyr's Apology<sup>72</sup> do not refer to such a rite. Tertullian seems to regard the rite described in Acts as universally practised in the Apostolic Church and as the normal method of conveying the Spirit at baptism<sup>73</sup>.

In Acts 19: 1f., Luke links this rite with baptism, but this is the only place he does so, although the laying on of hands after the previous baptism of the Samaritans could be seen as a completion of their baptism, but this is not explicitly stated; and Ananias laid hands on Paul before his baptism. Since Paul makes no reference to such a rite whereas in the letter to the Hebrews it is accepted as part of the baptismal practice, it is impossible to establish when the laying on of hands became accepted as part of the baptismal rite. Thus, the laying on of hands does not emerge as a major rite in the early Church.

As regards the origin of the practice, the New Testament gives no indication. It is certainly found in the Old Testament: in Deuteronomy 34:9, Moses chooses Joshua as his successor and lays hands on him, and in Genesis 48:14 the action is a form of blessing. D. Daube <sup>74</sup> shows what is involved in this action as it is employed in three major events:

- a) the offering of a sacrifice as in Leviticus 1:3f.
- b) The consecration of Levites in the service of the Temple, as in Numbers 8:10.

In both these cases the term used of the laying on of hands is "to lean", and it seems to have been believed that by "leaning" hands on a person or object someone could place his personality in that person or object, or animal, and so make it a substitute for himself.

For example, the scapegoat takes the place of the people, and by "leaning" his hands on Joshua (Numbers 27:18f.

and Deuteronomy 34:9) Moses made him almost another Moses.

c) The giving of a blessing as in Genesis 48:14. The term used here of the laying on of hands is "to place" the hands. By "placing" his hands on the sons of Joseph Jacob did not give them his personality but some gift which would be beneficial to them, and the laying on of hands in healing is the same usage.

Daube believes that the significance of the laying on of hands in baptism lies in the "pouring" of one's personality into another person. Beasley Murray<sup>75</sup> points out that there could be a difficulty in this interpretation of the rite in the case of Paul, because Ananias lays his hands on Paul that he might regain his sight and receive the Holy Spirit, which involves both usages: "to lean" hands on and "to place" hands on. Daube says that Luke probably meant that Ananias "placed" his hands in Paul to heal him and that the Spirit came down miraculously as it had come on Cornelius. Beasley Murray,<sup>76</sup> however, regards as a more reasonable explanation that which says that the laying on of hands cannot infer the passing on of one person's personality to another but that it falls into the category of blessing, of "placing" hands on.

The conclusion which it seems must be reached is that the laying on of hands was at some undeterminable time (later than the writing of Matthew's gospel since it is not mentioned there) adopted into the baptismal rite of the Church as a form of blessing to emphasise that



the gift of the Spirit is received at baptism, but the action is not intended to give something in addition to what the Church believed was already being given at baptism. At the time of its adoption the Church would not have been able to divide the baptismal rite into segments, with a different purpose attributed to each: the baptismal rite was one activity and when the laying on of hands was added it would be to clarify what was the meaning and purpose of the existing rite <sup>77</sup>.

Very few conclusions have been reached in this section concerning baptism in the New Testament, nevertheless, it is still possible to see a few fundamental similarities between the New Testament practice and the rite of Hippolytus: the New Testament emphasis on faith as an integral part of the baptismal experience can be found also in the catechumenate of Hippolytus' rite <sup>78</sup>; the link between the death of Christ and baptism is evident in the Paschal Mass which immediately follows baptism in the account given by Hippolytus <sup>79</sup>, and the laying on of hands (although not directly connected with baptism in the New Testament) has become part of the Hippolytean rite <sup>80</sup>. The rite of Hippolytus is, of course, a far more complex one than any baptismal practice imaginable in the New Testament. It may be that its complexity grew from an attempt to animate the Church's understanding of the baptismal rite and of what it achieved, an interpretation possibly not so very different from that of the New Testament writers, but the origin of the various elements of the rite cannot be traced here nor in the Secret Gospel of Mark, a non-canonical work closely associated with baptism.

## THE SECRET GOSPEL OF MARK

In 1958 while re-visiting the monastery of Mar Saba in the Judaeen desert, Morton Smith of Columbia University, New York discovered in the library a seventy two line fragment of what has proved to be, with as much certainty as possible, an authentic letter written by Clement of Alexandria between 175 and 200AD. This letter quotes a section from "the Secret Gospel of Mark", which was, apparently, a longer version of the canonical gospel.<sup>81</sup> According to the letter, this Secret Gospel was read in the Church at Alexandria, and had in fact been written by Mark in Alexandria. For, according to Clement, Mark had first written in Rome during the lifetime of Peter; he had written about Jesus' life, teaching and activity but had not given a full account since he omitted the more secret aspects of the story. It was later that he went to Alexandria and wrote the "secret" gospel which was to be read only by those who were members of the Church or who were in the process of initiation, and which was to be kept secret from all others. It was not unusual for Christian communities to be in possession<sup>82</sup> of "secret" gospels around the end of the second century and it was the development of episcopal activity and authority in the major centres of Christianity (Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Rome) which forced the churches to adhere to the accepted writings and reject the apocryphal works<sup>83</sup>, so that the discovery of the existence of such a document in Alexandria simply demonstrates that the Christian community here was no exception to a popular trend.

A presbyter, however, had betrayed the community and had given a copy of the Secret Gospel to Carpocrates who re-interpreted it and added to it. The Carpocratians, a heretical sect, originated around 130AD. and died out before the middle of the third century.<sup>84</sup> They believed that the way to salvation lay through sin, especially sexual sin, and they, therefore, adapted the Secret Gospel accordingly. Having spoken of the presbyter, Clement goes on to quote a passage from the Secret Gospel which follows Mark 10:34:

"And they came into Bethany. And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, 'Son of David have mercy on me'. But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth came to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan".

The Carpocratians added to this passage the words, "naked man, with naked man", no doubt to comply with their own code of behaviour, along with other additions to which Clement refers but does not quote. Morton Smith accepts the author of the Secret Gospel as Mark, and claims that the "mystery of the Kingdom of God" which Jesus taught to the youth was a water baptism which Jesus administered as a nocturnal rite to disciples he had chosen for this and who were then baptised individually as was the youth.

The rite consisted of immersion in water along with magical practices which remain unknown. This would certainly explain the presence of the youth dressed only in a linen cloth, but it would also rule out as false canonical Mark's account of the agony in the Garden which is itself very convincing.

In seeking the origins of the Longer Version (LV) of Mark, Smith's conclusion is that the Johannine account of the raising of Lazarus and the LV are independent renderings<sup>85</sup> of a common Aramaic source which was used by both John and Mark without either knowing the other. He tries to demonstrate by complex charts that the LV's text is definitely Markan and is not simply an addition based on the accounts given in John's gospel, but Walter Wink<sup>86</sup> concludes from his own analysis of the vocabulary that: "Linguistic evidence is too ambiguous to conclude from it that the author of the Longer Text was the same as the author of canonical Mark".

The dating of the work is also in doubt. Smith seems to believe that the Secret Gospel was part of an Aramaic source<sup>87</sup> which was written before Mark's gospel, in which case one might date the LV at around 50AD. He would support this dating with the claim that Matthew knew and drew upon some form of Mark which included the LV<sup>88</sup>. He sees the cry in the introduction to the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David" (Mtt. 15:22), which is not found in Mark, as proof that Matthew took this from the LV of Mark. It seems, however, much more likely that Matthew and the

LV adapted it from the cry of Bartimaeus in Mark 10:47f. As additional evidence he cites the appeal of the mother of James and John in Matthew 20:20 which he sees as an adaptation from LV's Salome. The traditional explanation of this incident seems to carry more weight than this one: the attribution of the ambition of the men to their mother so as to preserve the image of the sons of Zebedee. There is thus no evidence that Matthew knew a longer form of Mark, and the LV could, therefore have been added to the canonical version at any time after its writing. The references which could be interpreted as some kind of homosexual relationship between Jesus and Lazarus are of a Carpocratian nature and would provide as much of a basis for dating the LV as late as around 150AD., as Smith's evidence does for dating it earlier.

Smith puts forward a number of theses regarding Jesus and the baptismal rite. He sees baptism as similar to communion in effecting union with Jesus. This appears to ignore Luke's interpretation of the Last Supper as a Passover seder and not as a communion in the body and blood of Jesus. His second thesis is, on the other hand, valid, for he maintains that baptism is achieved by the Spirit<sup>89</sup>, which concept distinguishes Jesus' ministry from that of John the Baptist. He also holds that Jesus practised magic and that baptism is a magical ceremony. This overlooks the fact that Jesus did not institute any ceremony, magical or otherwise, the early Church being the first to do this. Another of his theses is that Paul

regarded baptism as a method of ascending into heaven, and that this idea can be traced back to Jesus. Paul, however, does not link his own baptism, or that of anyone else, with mysticism. Any suggestion of this in Paul's own conversion experience would have to be related to the Damascus road incident which came before his baptism, and also, Jesus' own baptism did not include any such experience of ascent into heaven. Another point he makes is that baptism frees those who receive it from the Mosaic Law.<sup>90</sup> Jesus certainly did not see himself or his disciples as bound to the letter of the Law, but he did not link freedom from it with baptism or any other rite: his own coming had fulfilled the Law.

If it were possible to date the Secret Gospel of Mark as an early work, and if it were possible to establish that it was written by the author of canonical Mark, or at least by some other orthodox writer, it would show baptism as a rite administered by Jesus himself and thus establish it yet more firmly as a rite approved by him. At the same time, however, it would raise at least two uncomfortable problems for the Church:

- i) The possible libertinism of Jesus and his disciples.<sup>91</sup>
- ii) His rite was an adult one which included instruction, and would have been quite unsuitable for children or infants. Also, it was administered in secret, and apparently kept secret from all but the one person chosen at that time by Jesus. That is, Jesus did not freely admit to practising such a rite, nor did those who received it appear to have admitted that they had been baptised even

to their fellow disciples. It would also have to be noted that baptism was not considered necessary for all his followers, nor was it the means of becoming one of them.

It seems, therefore, that Morton Smith has not proved his case. The Secret Gospel refers to a situation in the Alexandrian Church at the end of the second century, so that what it in fact shows, as has often been suspected, is that the line between orthodoxy and heresy in that area and at that time was very finely drawn. The Secret Gospel of Mark is in itself a very interesting discovery, but it is of no help in establishing the origins or tracing the development of Christian Baptism.

## NOTES

1. J.D.G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, London, 1970, p. 39.
2. G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, Exeter, 1962.
3. O. Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament*, London, 1950, p. 19.
4. The Church of Scotland Interim Report, 1955, p. 8f.; G.W.H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, London 1951, p.39.
5. A. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, London 1958, p. 340.
6. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p.42, where he makes reference to the cup of wrath.
7. R.H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, London 1972, p. 70f. cf. D. Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, London, 1972, p.360f.
8. See p.47f.on question of whether Jesus himself baptised.
9. Although John's was not the only such rite which may have influenced the early Church. In his book, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, Cambridge, 1968, p. 108, Walter Wink points out that the baptist movement was at its height during the period 150BC-150AD. when sects such as the Essenes, Nasoreans, Elkasites, Ebionites, Baptists and many others took firm root. He compares the baptist movement of this period with the modern Pentecostal movement in the United States which is composed of many groups whose only common ground may be "baptism of the Holy Spirit".
10. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
11. *ibid*, p. 110.
12. Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
13. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
14. *ibid*, p. 112, 113.
15. *ibid*, p. 127.
16. *ibid*, p. 129.
17. *ibid*, p. 129; cf. E. Best, *One Body in Christ*, 1955, p. 73.
18. Dunn expands on this theme in p. 111f. *op. cit.*



19. Rom. 1:16; 10:17; 15:18; 1 Cor. 1:21; 2:4; 15:1f.; 2 Cor. 2:14-17; 4:4-6; Gal. 3:2,5; etc.
20. See above, p. 42.
21. H.H. Wendt, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 1900, p. 112f.
22. K. Lake, *The Influence of Textual Criticism on the Exegesis of the New Testament*, 1904, p. 15f.
23. H. Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Johannis*, 1908, p. 8; cf. Th. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 1908, p. 186., where he takes a similar view.
24. B. Weiss, *Das Johannesevangelium Zweite Aufl.*, 1902, p. 110f.
25. Beasley Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 230f.; H. Cremer, *Taufe, Wiedergeburt und Kindertaufe in Kraft des Heiligen Geistes*, 3te Aufl., Güttersloh, 1917, p. 42; A. Schlatter, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 3, 1947, p. 89; C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, London, 1955, p. 174; R.H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel*, 1956, p. 131. cf. W.F. Howard (revised by C.K. Barrett), *The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation*, London 1955, p. 298. In his section on "Theories of Redaction" he quotes F. Spitta, *Das Johannesevangelium als Quelle der Geschichte Jesu*, Gottingen, 1910. Spitta divides the gospel into three sections:
- a) the original gospel (or, Grundschrift);
  - b) editor's additional material from written sources;
  - c) editor's own reflections.
- In Spitta's view, Jn. 3:5 does not belong in category a), that is, it is not part of the original text, which is a view contrary to that of those already named in this note. Spitta, however, has a tendency to divide up individual verses between c) and b), and because it is so difficult to be certain where everything belongs in his theory Howard has not attempted to determine this. From the material reproduced by Howard in this section on Redaction, the hand of the Redactor does not appear to be generally seen in this verse.
26. W.F. Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 205, 206.
27. J.H. Bernard, *I.C.C.*, vol 1, 1928, p. 105.
28. J. Moffatt, *Theology of the Gospels*, London, 1912. p.197
29. H. Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel*, Amsterdam, 1929. p.48f.
30. Beasley Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 67; Walter Wink, *op. cit.*, p. 94, 95.
31. A.F. Loisy, *Le Quatrième Évangile*, Paris, 1921. p.331f.
32. A. Schweitzer, *The Mystery of Paul the Apostle*, E.T., 1931, p. 234f.

33. Beasley Murray, op. cit., p. 67, 68.
34. E.K. Lee, *Theology*, vol. LVII, 1954, p. 413.
35. J.H. Bernard, op. cit., p. 133.
36. G.H.C. Macgregor, *The Gospel of John*, 1928, p. 93.
37. C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1963, p. 236 and 145.
38. Beasley Murray, op. cit., p. 68, 69.
39. *ibid.*
40. *ibid.*
41. *ibid.*
42. C.K. Barrett, op. cit., p. 192.
43. H.G. Marsh, *The Origin and Significance of New Testament Baptism*, 1941, p. 122.
44. Beasley Murray, op. cit., p. 70.
45. F.J. Leenhardt, *Le Baptême Chrétien, son origine, sa signification, Cahiers Théologiques de l'Actualité Protestante*, No. 4, Neuchâtel, 1946, p. 34.
46. W.F. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism*, Manchester, 1941, p. 31.
47. Beasley Murray, op. cit., p. 70.
48. H.G. Marsh, op. cit., p. 125.
49. J. Weiss, *The History of Primitive Christianity*, E.T., 1937, p. 50f.
50. Dunn, op. cit., p. 40.
51. *ibid*, p. 49.
52. *ibid*, p. 43, 44.
53. *ibid*, p. 85.
54. Mk. 9:38-40; Mtt. 7:22f.; Acts 19:13-16.
55. Dunn, op. cit., p. 88.
56. *ibid.* p. 89; cf., Beasley Murray, p. 110-112.
57. J. Weiss, op. cit., p. 50f.
58. F.J.F. Jackson and K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, part 1, 1920, p. 338f.; cf. Silva New, *The Name, Baptism and Laying on of Hands, The Beginnings*

of Christianity, 5, 1933, p. 135.

59. Beasley Murray, op. cit., p. 95-97.

60. J. Ysebaert, Greek Baptismal Terminology, Nijmegen, 1962, ad loc.

61. F.H. Chase, The Lord's Command to Baptise, J.T.S., VI, 1905, p. 481f., also VIII, 1907, p. 161f.

62. J.A. Robinson, In the Name, J.T.S., VII, 1906, p. 186f.

63. Baptizein (esthai) eis tina y eis to onoma tinos, Anal. Sacr. Tarracon I, 1925, p. 115f.

64. A. Oepke, Bap̄tō, baptizō, baptismā, baptistēs, Th.W., I, p. 528, 537.

65. E. Fuchs, Die Freiheit des Glaubens, 1949, p. 28; E. Gaugler, Der Römerbrief, I Teil, 1945, ad loc. In disagreement see: Beasley Murray, op. cit., p. 129 and J. Weiss, Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments, 1907, I, p. 636; cf. H. Schlier, Der Brief an die Galater, 1951, p. 125; R. Schnackenburg, Todes - und Lebensgemeinschaft mit Christus, Neue Studien zu Rom. 6:1-11, Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift, 1955, p. 41f.

66. Dunn, op. cit., p. 188, on water baptism, and p. 42, 43, on baptism in Spirit and fire.

67. ibid, p. 125.

68. ibid, p. 140-141; cf. E. Stommel, Romische Quartalschrift, 49 (1954), 1-20.

69. Acts 8: 14-17.

70. F.H. Chase, Confirmation in the Apostolic Age, 1909, p. 35-41.

71. Didache VII.

72. I Apology 61, ed. G. Kruger, Die Apologien Justini des Martyrers, Tübingen, 1915.

73. De Baptismo VIII, ed. A. Reifferscheid and G. Wissowa, C.S.E.L., XX 1, p. 207, lines 16-17.

74. D. Daube, The Laying on of Hands, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism, 1956, p. 224f.

75. Beasley Murray, op. cit., p. 123.

76. ibid.

77. A. Richardson, op. cit., p. 355; Beasley Murray, op. cit., p. 124, 125.

78. Apostolic Tradition II 1-3, ed. G. Dix, London, 1968, p. 23, cf. Ap. Trad. XXI 11-18 and 35-37.
79. Ap. Trad. XXIII 1f., and p. 40f.
80. *ibid* XX 3, p. 31.
81. Morton Smith reviewed by Walter Wink, Union Seminary Quarterly Review, vol. XXX 1, (Fall 1974), p. 3.
82. The Rhossos community had its Gospel of Peter which Eusebius considers to have been acceptable reading provided no heresy was thus introduced (H.E. 6. 12).
83. Morton Smith reviewed by W.H.C. Frend, New York Review of Books, June 1973.
84. Origen, Contra Celsum, ed. P. Koetschau. G.C.S. 23. Leipzig, 1899.
85. Morton Smith, Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1973, p. 125ff. and Appendix E.
86. Walter Wink, p. 5.
87. Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark, p. 194.
88. *ibid*. pp. 102, 106, et al.
89. *ibid*. pp. 215, 219, 236.
90. *ibid*. pp. 211, 213, 216, 248-251, et al.
91. It should be said that while there is evidence of libertinism in the book of Revelation and also a sense of freedom in Paul's preaching there is no evidence of this in the Gospels or in the Pharisees' criticism of Jesus. Such activities and attitudes, therefore, do not tend to be traced back to Jesus himself. I believe, however, that if the Secret Gospel were accepted as an authentic Markan document of early date, claiming personal knowledge of Jesus, it would pose problems for the Church which later documents do not.

\* Dunn, *op.cit.* p. 85:  
 " MATHĒTĒS must have been used with greater or less strictness by different groups, and so long as there were people still alive who had known or known about Jesus, and who looked up to him with some degree of loyalty, MATHĒTĒS must have been a rather loose term. By confining HOI MATHĒTAI to Christian communities Luke precisely delimits Christians from other groups; and by his unique use of MATHĒTAI here he is able to preserve the distinctive Christian title while at the same time acknowledging the (albeit imperfect) discipleship of others ....."

3.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament water was a very important element in the accounts of the presence and activity of Yahweh. There are many examples of this use of water imagery. In Judges 5 there is the story of the theophany from the South in the Song of Deborah:

"The earth shook,  
And the heavens poured;  
Yea the clouds poured water".

It is to be found again in Psalm 68:8ff., which says:

"The earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain,  
at the presence of God.....  
Rain in abundance, O God, thou didst shed abroad;  
Thou didst restore thy heritage as it languished".

Closely connected with this water imagery is that of the river:

"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of  
God,  
the holy habitation of the most high". (Psalm 46:4)

It is Yahweh's presence in Jerusalem, here represented by the river image, which gives victory over her enemies and bestows blessing and fertility. The river in Jerusalem, and its life-giving power, is also spoken of in Psalm 65:10; Isaiah 33:21; Joel 4:18; Ezekiel 47, and Zechariah 14:8. The idea of the river is integral to belief in the presence of God. After the exile the new community of God will return to Israel where Yahweh will again dwell, and the imagery used to demonstrate the effects of this is that of a stream of water flowing out of the eastern side of the Temple, fertilising the valley of Arabah:

"And when it enters the stagnant waters of the sea the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes every living creature which swarms will live.....  
so everything will live where the water goes".  
(Ezekiel 47:1ff.)

That this water and river imagery influenced New Testament and early Christian baptism is demonstrated in John's choice of a river for his baptismal rite, and in the early Church's insistence that cold running water (ie. A river or stream) was to be preferred for the administration of her baptismal rite. The influence can also be seen in the Church's belief that the Holy Spirit is present in, or enters, the water during baptism,<sup>1</sup> cleansing and giving new life to the candidate, as the Old Testament water and river removed stagnation and gave new life and protection wherever it flowed.

It is not only the choice of element which can be traced back to the Old Testament sources but also something of the Christian understanding of the rite, as in the Genesis flood story, for example. In both the J and P accounts the evil of mankind is the cause of the forty days of rain which results in the death of the old way of life and in the establishing of a new era. The story ends with an assurance from God that the world will never again suffer such a catastrophe, and in P this takes the form of a covenant between God and mankind. Before the days of written contracts it was the custom when solemn vows were taken and promises made to appoint a sign which would act as a reminder to those involved of the agreement or "covenant":

"These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that you may be a witness for me that I dug this well. Therefore that place was called Beersheba; because there both of them swore an oath".

(Genesis 21:30f.)

The sign chosen for the covenant with Noah is the rainbow.<sup>+</sup>  
The sign chosen for the new covenant was water baptism,\*  
and it seems very probable that at least something of  
this Old Testament understanding was carried over into  
the rite: one's own baptism and the baptism of others  
acting as a reminder of the agreement entered into with  
God and with his community.<sup>2</sup>

It would be easy to say that the Christian method of  
employing this water symbol developed out of the Jewish  
ritual washings. They must certainly have had some  
influence and therefore cannot be ignored, but there are  
other, apparently closer links with Christian baptism  
from non-Jewish sources which must also be noted and which  
will be considered elsewhere.

Another possible influence is a standard feature of  
ancient legal procedure by which appeal was made to the  
gods for a decision and which often involved various  
trials by ordeal: most commonly, fire and water. The  
element which concerns us here is water, and the  
archetype of all water ordeals is the Noahic flood, in  
which all the features of subsequent river trials are  
found:

- a) the revelation of the verdict of God;
- b) the use of water as the element;
- c) the destruction of the guilty and the deliverance of  
the innocent;
- d) the possession of the land by those saved.

Similar features are to be found also in the stories of



the crossing of the Jordan in Joshua 4:19, and also in 2:9f., and Ezekiel 15:13f. John the Baptist was to make known the impending judgement of God and may, therefore, have seen the baptism he administered as a symbolic water ordeal. As seen above, BAPTIZŌ (BAPTISMA) was used in speaking of these traditional water experiences: Paul refers to Israel's Red Sea crossing as "being baptised" (I Corinthians 10:2, cf. p.42 above), and Peter calls the Noahic Flood a baptism (I Peter 3:21). John himself is recorded as speaking of a baptism when he announces the judgement which the One mightier than he will pass on the people:

"He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with Fire".  
(Matt. 3:11f., Lke. 3:16f., Mk. 1:8)

Although this concept may have occupied a place in the minds of those who first administered Christian baptism, it would be difficult to defend any claim to its having a significant lasting effect on the rite as it developed, and the rite recorded by Hippolytus does not appear to have had any judgmental significance.

### Ritual Washings

Ritual washings were a common feature in many of the pagan cults, as already noted, and also in Judaism. There are a number of basic concepts which lie behind these and which could indicate some relationship with Christian baptism:

a) It was believed that certain waters can be impregnated with the power of the deity, which could then communicate

itself to persons and objects immersed in the water. The ability of water to cleanse in a religious sense was probably related to the belief that gods were present in the water. It was believed that since a river or stream had movement it was "living" water which possessed mysterious powers. Washing in these waters was a method of doing homage to the gods. It is this kind of belief in the cleansing and healing properties of water which is expressed in John 5: 1ff., in the story of the pool at the Sheep Gate.

b) Contact with deity was considered to be extremely dangerous because the power of holiness could destroy human beings. This fear is demonstrated in the theophany of Exodus 19 where Moses is told:

"Go down and warn the people lest they break through to the Lord to gaze and many of them perish. And also let the priests who come near consecrate themselves lest the Lord break out upon them".

(Ex. 19: 21f.)

It therefore seems that the necessity for the High Priest to bathe himself before appearing "before the Lord" is the only way he can approach God and live.

c) There was considerable fear of contact with birth, sickness and death, which denoted contact with demonic powers and therefore required cleansing.

d) Body and soul, flesh and spirit, were seen as bound together. Sacred water, or blood, applied to the body would affect the whole person.

Most of these concepts are to be found in some form or other in the Christian rite. However, it should not be forgotten that they are not unique to the Old Testament and that practices which bear far greater similarity to

the Christian rite are to be found outwith the Old Testament.

In any discussion of Christian baptism Jewish proselyte baptism must be mentioned. The Talmud states that this rite can be traced back to the threefold requirements for Israelites entering the covenant: circumcision, baptism by water, and sprinkling with blood <sup>3</sup>. Proselyte baptism is much more closely related to the once-for-all effects of the covenant than to the repeated ritual washings. The proselyte has to be baptised "in the name of God", and take on himself "the yoke of the Lord". Great care was taken to ensure that those being baptised realised what they were doing and why, and what were the consequences of their actions. While still in the water the proselyte was interrogated as to his faith and intention, which is very similar to the threefold questioning of the Christian baptismal candidate.

The proselyte bath was regarded as initiation into the Israelite faith, into the instruction of Torah, and into communion with God. There are thus certain close parallels with the Christian rite. However, the Old Testament does not seem to know of any practice of baptising Gentile converts, nor do Philo or Josephus. It appears that the oldest evidence to be found is in the Mishnah in the form of a discussion between Hillel and Shammai, and these texts belong to the time before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. Proselyte baptism is also mentioned in the Sybilline Oracles IV. 162-70 (c. 80)

and is spoken of by Epictetus around 94AD.<sup>4</sup> Gentiles do not seem to have been considered unclean until the end of the first century BC., and purification by ritual washing would not have been necessary since circumcision would have been sufficient before this. It was possibly as an attempt to stop Jews marrying Gentiles<sup>5</sup> that this classification was made. There is a passage in the Testament of Levi 14:6 which speaks of proselyte baptism, according to Jeremias<sup>6</sup>, although it does not name it as such:

"With harlots and adulteresses shall ye be joined, and the daughters of the Gentiles shall ye take to wife, Purifying them with unlawful purifications; And your union shall be like unto Sodom and Gomorrah".

With the discovery and publication of the Qumran material it has been possible to date the Aramaic Testament of Levi to the second century BC. at the latest.<sup>7</sup>

Jeremias sees the reference to proselyte baptism in:

"Purifying them with unlawful purifications".<sup>8</sup>

He says that the writer was opposed to proselyte baptism because he was afraid that it would encourage mixed marriages. When proselyte baptism was introduced it is known that Jewish theologians had difficulty justifying it. Jeremias, therefore, suggests that this phrase comes "from the time in which the assertion that the Gentiles were Levitically impure was a contested novelty, ie., from the end of the first century BC.". This passage would thus prove that proselyte baptism was in fact practised before the time of Christianity, and this is Jeremias' argument: he acknowledges that the main references to proselyte

baptism are to be found in writings dating from 70 to 135AD., and states that in the second century BC. circumcision was sufficient for the initiation of converted gentiles. His argument that proselyte baptism is pre-Christian is, therefore, based on this early dating of the Testament of Levi and on his own interpretation of it. Such early dating of the Testament of Levi would place it in a period when there is no other reference to proselyte baptism but when ritual washings would be in general practice. The reference seems much more likely to be to a ritual washing which may or may not have developed later into the rite of proselyte baptism. It would, therefore, be difficult to prove that this rite had any influence on Christian baptism, for direct references to it are too late to have had much influence on Christianity. It seems more likely that it developed parallel in time with the Christian rite, and it may be an indication of a trend in ritual practices: making increased use of water.

#### Circumcision

Circumcision was given to Abraham<sup>9</sup> as a sign and seal of the justification which he obtained through faith by believing in the promises of God. Paul says:

"It was reckoned to him as righteousness"<sup>10</sup>.

By this act Abraham's sins were forgiven; he was cleansed; he received another promise from God, and his name was changed. This, therefore, was a turning point for Abraham, and this is a concept which is also found in Christian

baptism. Also similar to Christian baptism is this:

"The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live".

(Deuteronomy 30:6)

The person who is circumcised has an obligation to live according to the covenant; the one who is baptised has an obligation to live according to the teaching and commandments of Jesus. Paul wrote to the Romans:

"For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs".

(15:8)

This shows that circumcision was not just the sign of a national covenant with the Hebrew people: its significance, as far as Paul was concerned, should reach further. It is a spiritual thing which was always open to all people.

The New Testament interpretation is certainly universal as in Romans 15:7-13, Galatians 3:6f., 13, 14, 17, 18, and 4:21f. Cullmann says:

"Abraham, not in the sense of natural succession but of divine salvation-history, is the ancestor of the members of the Church of Christ. What holds for Abraham holds also for circumcision, which he received on the basis of the righteousness of his faith in the promise of this success-ion". 11

Thus the spiritual ancestry of members of the Church can be traced back to Abraham.

Although the outward form of Christian baptism corresponds much more closely with proselyte baptism than with circumcision, the understanding of the Christian rite seems much closer to the meaning of circumcision.

Cullmann <sup>12</sup> points out that there is both adult and infant

circumcision and adult and infant proselyte baptism, but children born of Jewish parents would not have been baptised, only those entering Judaism with their parents. This, therefore, cannot be taken to be the model for Christian infant or child baptism. He also says, however, that the concept of Christian baptism replacing circumcision is not a later addition to the Faith but is to be found in Colossians 2:11 "explicitly", and implicitly in Romans 2:25ff; Galatians 3:6ff and Ephesians 2:11ff., and that there is thus a basic link between the two. He, therefore, cannot understand how Barth can deny that there is such a relationship while still holding that Baptism is that which replaces circumcision <sup>13</sup>.

Cullmann regards the link between the two as undeniable even from the "terminological considerations". The New Testament uses the word SPHRAGIZESTHAI when speaking of baptism and it also speaks of circumcision as SPHRAGIS. There is, in addition, the fact that circumcision is referred to as "a being born again", and the circumcised are called "holy" which corresponds with the Christian view of baptism. He goes on to dispute Barth's statement that circumcision is reception only into a racial community and is "therefore" relevant only to male children, whereas Christian baptism has nothing to do with any racial group or family, but has everything to do with the individual's faith. <sup>14</sup>.

Cullmann, however, points out that the promise made to Abraham was that he would be father, not to one nation but to many nations <sup>15</sup> and that circumcision, therefore, is not limited to any one race and is not concerned merely

with natural succession. His conclusion is that Christianity adopted the purification rite of proselyte baptism (which was purely a ritual cleansing) but attached to it the meaning of circumcision.

Jeremias, on the other hand, sees a close connection between proselyte baptism itself and Christian baptism<sup>16</sup>. While he regards the links between primitive Christian baptismal instruction and the catechumenate of Jewish proselyte baptism to be somewhat vague, he believes that the form of the administration of the two rites firms up the link between them. For, in both there is complete immersion; flowing water is preferred (though in neither case is it considered absolutely essential); in both the candidate makes a confession of sins, and women let down their hair and remove all ornaments for the administration of the rite.<sup>17</sup> He also tends to attach Jewish conversion theology to proselyte baptism rather than to circumcision, but since circumcision was a far older rite, carrying the full weight of tradition, it would seem more natural for this theology to apply to circumcision than to the fairly recent practice of baptism which would merely be an addition to the many existing Jewish purification rituals.

The close similarities to be found outwith the Old Testament to the Christian practice and the vast difference between the rite of Hippolytus and any Old Testament practices: the highly developed nature of the rite with its detailed instructions for administration; its specified period of preparation; its liturgy and ritual; suggest a source of



influence beyond that of the Old Testament. This is not to deny the importance of the Old Testament water rituals which in the period between the Old Testament era and the New Testament era and in the early years of the Church became formalised in cults such as those of Qumran and of John the Baptist.

## NOTES

1. cf. Tertullian, De Baptismo 15. (Ref. is to Church of this period)
2. cf. 2 Kings 5, for story of Naaman the Syrian who was cured of a skin condition by dipping himself seven times in the Jordan.
3. Ex. 7:48, 19:10, 24:8; Josh. 5:1f.; Num 15:15.
4. Epictetus, Dissertations II IX, ed. E. Capp, T.E. Page and W.H.D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library, p. 272,3, lines 19-21.
5. Test. Levi 14:6.
6. J. Jeremias, Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, London 1962. pp. 27,8.
7. ibid. pp. 26-29. J.T. Milik, Le Testament de Levi en araméen. Fragment de la grotte 4 de Qumran. Revue Biblique 62, 1955. p. 399.
8. Jeremias, op. cit. p. 27.
9. Gen. 17:4-14.
10. Gal. 3:6.
11. O. Cullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, London 1950, p. 59.
12. ibid. p. 56.
13. ibid. pp. 57, 58. (K. Barth, The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism. London 1948.)
14. ibid. pp. 57, 58.
15. Romans 4: 17, 18.
16. Jeremias, op. cit. p. 30f.
17. ibid. p. 31.

+ The sign chosen by God.

\* The sign chosen by the Church, although there is no record of a formal decision on the choice.

4.

THE QUMRAN COMMUNITY AND THE RITE  
OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

## The Community of Qumran

Excavation of the caves and ruins at Qumran revealed evidence of a religious community, probably part of the Essene movement, which was destroyed in 68AD <sup>1</sup>.

Six caves had been discovered containing seven complete scrolls and fragments of sixty manuscripts of biblical books. During the excavation of the caves themselves, begun in 1949, it was decided also to excavate the ruins nearby in an attempt to discover if any connection existed between them, and this latter excavation began in 1951. The results of this were to show that a community of people had lived there in tents and booths, of which nothing remained, and that the ruins themselves consisted of a central building, serving possibly as a central gathering place for the community which was encamped there<sup>2</sup>. The layout and history of the buildings are fully described by Yigael Yadin <sup>3</sup> and it is not, therefore, necessary to repeat these details here.

If the buildings help us to understand something of the way of life of the community at Qumran, it is the scrolls which show us how the community understood itself. From the scrolls we learn that members of the community are called "Sons of Light" and promise "to love all the Sons of Light, each according to his lot in the Council of God, and to hate all Sons of Darkness, each according to his guilt in the vengeance of God". Thus the theme of light and darkness emerges similar to the teaching of the Didache <sup>4</sup>, compiled only shortly after the destruction of the Qumran community. Also expected of them is that they give all that they have to the life of the community.

As part of the ceremony of initiation, according to the Manual of Discipline <sup>6</sup>, novices swear "not to turn away from following Him because of any dread or trial which might occur in the dominion of Belial", which is not unlike the renunciation of Satan during the Christian Baptismal liturgy as in that recorded by Hippolytus <sup>7</sup>. There is also a period of preparation prior to baptism which lasts, in all, three years <sup>8</sup>, again similar to early Christian practice <sup>9</sup>.

The concept of spirit figures largely in the thinking of the Qumran community. This is a holy spirit, or hallowed spirit <sup>10</sup>. This spirit, however, which is sought by members of the Qumran community is not the "Holy Spirit" as in the New Testament, but is rather a spirit of holiness <sup>11</sup>, which will purify them from all evil deeds. Therefore, while there may be a similarity between this concept and the references to personal holiness in the letters of the New Testament <sup>12</sup> and to Paul's "Spirit of holiness" in Romans 1:14, the similarity between the New Testament concept and that of Qumran does not appear to be particularly strong and should not be over-emphasised.

The purpose of the community itself is set out in one of the non Biblical Scrolls from the original discovery of 1947: the Manual of Discipline or the "Rule of Qumran", which dates to some time in the first century BC <sup>13</sup>. The purpose is to separate themselves from those who are not obedient to God; to share property; to submit to the authority of the sons of Zadok; to practise truth in community with humility, righteousness and justice, love of mercy and walking humbly in all their ways <sup>14</sup>.

The baths or baptisms are central to community life, and, as already noted <sup>15</sup>, there are certain similarities to the Christian practice, but a major difference is that they are not once-for-all but are repeated, although they are also employed as an initiation rite. Many cisterns were found at Qumran but whether or not these were used for immersions is still a matter of debate <sup>16</sup>, for Parah 8:8 and Miqvaoth 5:4 say that all seas and rivers are suitable for this purpose, and so, special cisterns may not have been considered necessary. If this were the case it would enhance similarities which do exist between the Qumran practice and that of the early Christians, in so far as cisterns or fonts do not figure in the earliest baptismal acts, but, again, there is no clear evidence of this at Qumran.

Also in doubt is the identity of the people who lived at Qumran. Who were they ? Their community existed at a time when there were many religious sects and groups, many of whom were liable to persecution and who might well have withdrawn to such a community as Qumran. The most marked similarity is to that group of people who came to be known as "Essenes". The Essenes, like the people of Qumran, shared all their belongings: gave all that they had to their community's life. They lived in scattered encampments and observed rules of obedience similar to those recorded in the Manual of Discipline <sup>17</sup>. In addition to this there is the evidence of Pliny, who died in 79AD, speaking in his "Naturalis Historia" of Essenes who lived on the west shore of the Dead Sea <sup>18</sup>. The community at Qumran could, therefore, have been Essenes or a group whose life-style

and religious practices and rules were very similar to those of the Essenes, but information about the Essenes<sup>\*</sup> is very limited and is insufficient to enable firm conclusions to be reached regarding their relationship, if any, to the community at Qumran. Because of the many sects in existence at this time, then, it is not possible to link with any certainty the Qumran sect with other groups contemporary with it. The closest one can come to answering the question of who the people at Qumran were is to say that they were a religious community, probably part of the Essene movement, and probably at least known to John the Baptist.

What, then, can be said about John the Baptist ?

John the Baptist was a preacher and the leader of a group of disciples working in the Jordan valley in the early first century AD. Contrary to the image usually projected by the Christian Church, John's group was only one of a number of sects practising a baptismal rite in that area during the same period of history. Philo and Josephus write of the Essenes who have a regular bath of purification<sup>19</sup>. The Manual of Discipline of the Dead Sea Scrolls sect shows that they too employed baptismal rites, and Epiphanius makes reference to a sect called the Hemerobaptists, which was in existence before 70AD., and whose main characteristic was lustrations performed before their meal<sup>20</sup>. The Masbotheans are another group of the period but little is known about them. Their name probably derives from the Aramaic word meaning to "baptise". John, therefore, was not introducing a practice previously unknown.

John's baptism seems to have been similar in some ways to the rites of other sects, but his emphasis appears to have been quite different. In the Qumran baptism of initiation, for example, the basic idea is of cleansing, although references to confession and repentance show that it did have at least some moral significance, with forgiveness of sins being granted only when one has repented. In John's rite the moral aspect is of the greatest importance, but baptism does not bestow forgiveness, it only makes forgiveness possible at the last judgement. The Qumran sect saw themselves as the "faithful remnant", and baptism admitted the candidate to this group, but only after a period of preparation and after thorough interview.



John's baptism could be seen as admission to the community of people who were prepared for the coming of the Messiah, and for the judgement which will follow. There is, however, no evidence of any period of preparation, particularly not one of such length as was necessary at Qumran, nor does there seem to have been any questioning of those who came for baptism, beyond their being asked if they had repented. Again, baptism into Qumran meant separating oneself from the world and conforming to strict regulations, whereas those baptised by John returned to their own homes immediately, and he had only a small following of permanent disciples as opposed to the large numbers at Qumran. It therefore seems possible that John may have been influenced by the practices of such sects as that at Qumran, but it would be difficult to equate his rite totally with theirs.

At the centre of John's teaching is always the message that the end and the final judgement are imminent. In Matthew 3:10 and Luke 3:7 he says that the axe is at the root of the trees: in Old Testament times trees were cut down near the Jordan, and also in the Old Testament the cutting down of a tree is a symbol of judgement<sup>21</sup>, while the reference to winnowing is well known as one of judgement. When John speaks of a future rite EN PNEUMATI HAGIŌ he is not anticipating any doctrine of the Trinity: the "spirit of God" is found also in the Old Testament<sup>22</sup>. He probably does not envisage some new form of baptism but an outpouring of God's spirit, which is by no means an original idea. In Ezekiel the future

gift of the spirit is linked with the idea of sprinkling water:

"I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you.....  
And I will put my spirit within you.....". 23

And in Isaiah:

"For I will pour water on the thirsty land,  
and streams on the dry ground;  
I will pour my spirit upon your descendants,  
and my blessing on your offspring". 24

John continues in the prophetic tradition in his preaching of the coming judgement, and he comes close to the ideas of the apocalypticists in his view that this judgement is imminent. His own words must have recalled to the people much of the prophetic writings, and his baptism could easily be seen as an expansion of the teaching of the prophets, with its emphasis on the ethical and moral demands of a righteous God. The Jews believed that prophecy had ceased long before and that the only prophets who remained were false ones<sup>25</sup>:

"We do not see our signs;  
there is no longer any prophet  
and there is none among us who knows how long". 26

However, they believed that the gift of prophecy would return and that it would mark the beginning of the new age:

"And it shall come to pass afterward,  
that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;  
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy". 27

During the intertestamental period, the idea developed that one particular prophet would come at the beginning of the new age. Some sources specify that the prophet

will be Elijah or Moses come to life again, while others speak only of a prophet. In all, he is an eschatological figure. Jesus certainly seems to have regarded him as an eschatological figure when he says to the crowds, speaking of John:

"Why then did you go out ? To see a prophet ? Yes I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written,

'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee'". 28

And:

"For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come". 29

Also:

"They were afraid of the people, for all held that John was a real prophet". 30

Mark's gospel says very little of John's preaching or of his activity, but speaks rather of his diet and his clothing, because together they confirm John's role as the forerunner: his clothing is like that of Elijah <sup>31</sup>; his diet is that of the old strict Nazirites; "all" the people hear him and repent. Mark's point is that John is the prophet of the end-time: the eschatological messenger of Malachi <sup>32</sup>. Elijah will come before the end:

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers".

This restoration came to be seen as a mass repentance by Israel. Mark says that "all" have repented at the word of John and, therefore, he must be the Elijah who is to come. What John says or does not say, what he does, is of little importance compared with what he is.

Speaking of John's baptismal rite, Mark and Matthew <sup>33</sup> state that the people were baptised "confessing their sins", but whether this confession was formal or not is not specified. Although there is no detailed description of any of John's baptisms, not even of his baptism of Jesus, it is almost certain that the rite was administered by total immersion since when Jesus had been baptised he "came up out of the water" <sup>34</sup>. Another assumption from the brief account of that baptism is that the rite was once-for-all. Jesus was baptised only once, but he could have been the exception. However, that the people were baptised and then returned to their own homes seems to support this assumption. Little more can be said about the physical form that John's rite took.

#### The Baptism of Jesus

The baptism of Jesus came to occupy a very important place in the later Church, and in the Eastern Church to this day the feast of the Epiphany recalls, not the showing of Jesus to the Wise Men, but the baptism of Jesus <sup>35</sup>. The Church Fathers considered it to be the type of all subsequent baptisms, but the New Testament writers do not record any such relationship, possibly because they felt that the connection was clear enough and required no emphasis by them or because they believed that no other baptism could be like that of Jesus and therefore saw no relationship other than that Jesus was in fact baptised in water.

At his baptism Jesus was acknowledged "Son of God"<sup>36</sup>, and in him, Paul claims, we become sons of God in baptism by faith<sup>37</sup>. The Spirit descended on Jesus, and the Church came to believe that the Spirit was in some way given and received at baptism. In receiving baptism Jesus began a new way of life, with his public ministry commencing shortly after his baptism. The candidate for believers' baptism also, in theory at least, commits himself to a different way of life, and this certainly was the belief of the Church in the second and third centuries<sup>38</sup>. There are, therefore, ways in which Christian baptism is very similar to Jesus' own baptism. We cannot, however, assume that Christian baptism developed from this event. There is no real evidence that Jesus himself ever baptised. It could be claimed that he baptised before his public ministry began, but one would then have to ask why he stopped. It could also be claimed that he and his disciples did baptise but that it was just never recorded.<sup>39</sup> In view of the great importance which very quickly came to be attached to the rite by the Church it seems very strange that someone did not consider this practice of Jesus important enough to record. Also, from the records of the book of Acts, baptism was not considered essential either for the receiving of the Spirit or for becoming a member of the community of believers ( though it became the normal method).

Since neither Jesus himself nor his disciples baptised during his public ministry, and since his only commands

to baptise are regarded as later additions, one can conclude that he did not consider it a necessary part of his mission. The fact of Jesus' baptism must have influenced the Church in its adoption of the rite, but it does not explain why the Church decided that baptism was necessary or helpful, nor does it explain the way in which the rite developed. The activity of John the Baptist was of sufficient importance to be recorded in the New Testament writings and had, therefore, made a considerable impression on the early Christian community. This fact must have helped make a water rite an easily accepted one for the Church, if not indeed an obvious rite, but it still does not account for the form the Christian rite took and the interpretation which came to be placed upon it.

## NOTES

- I. A.R.C. Leaney, *The Rule of Qumran and Its Meaning*. London, 1966. p. 31-33.
2. Ygael Yadin, *The Message of the Scrolls*. London, 1959. p. 58, 59.
3. *ibid.* p. 63-66.
4. The Letter of Barnabas, 18 - 20, speaks of the Ways of Light and of Darkness. Didache, I - 5, speaks in very similar terms but calls them the Ways of Life and of Death.
5. Yadin, *op. cit.*, p. II4.
6. *ibid.* p. II5.
7. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition XXI*. cf. Tertullian, *De Corona*, 3.
8. Leaney, *op. cit.*, p. I61 and I92.
9. Hippolytus, *Ap. Trad.*, XVI - XIX. (Three years are to be spent as "hearers of the word" before baptism.)
10. I QS. 3:7. cf. 8:I6, and Leaney, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
11. Leaney, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
12. 2 Cor. I:I2; 7:I; I Thess. 3:I3 and Heb. I2:I0.
13. Leaney, *op. cit.*, p. II6.
14. I QS. 5: I-7a.
15. See p.82,83 above.
16. Leaney, *op. cit.*, p. I39.
17. Yadin, *op. cit.*, p. I82.
18. cf. Yadin, p. I85.
19. Josephus, *The Jewish War II 8*. (Tr. H. St.J. Thackeray. Loeb Classical Library, vols. 4-9. London, 1926-65)
20. Epiphanius, *Panarion XIX 5:6-7*. Ed. Karl Holl, G.C.S. vol. I, p. 223.
21. Isaiah I0:33, 34.
22. Isaiah 63: I0,II; Psalm 5I:II.

23. Ezekiel 36:25, 27.
24. Isaiah 44:3.
25. Zechariah 13:3-6.
26. Psalm 74:9.
27. Joel 2:28.
28. Matt. 11:9, 10; Luke 7:26, 27.
29. Matt. 11:13, 14.
30. Mark 11:32. cf. Matt. 21:26 and Luke 20:26.
31. 2 Kings 1:8; Zechariah 13:4.
32. Malachi 4:5f.
33. Mark 1:5; Matt. 3:6.
34. Mark 1:10, Matt. 3:16.
35. Wheeler Robinson, Sacraments and Eschatology. Theology, 55, 1952. p. 54.
36. Mark 1:11.
37. Gal. 3:26f.
38. The theory in infant baptism has to be different, and thus places another question mark against any claim that Christian baptism developed from John's rite.
39. Maurice Goguel, Eng. tr. = The Life of Jesus. London, 1933. p. 315; Au Seuil De L'Evangile: Jean Baptiste. Payot, 1928. p. 235-274.

It should be noted also that John's Gospel does not consider John the Baptist to be a forerunner, because the Logos has always been, and, therefore, there can be no one who could (except perhaps to his public ministry) be a forerunner.



\* The Essenes

Since it is possible that John the Baptist might originally have participated in the Essene, or similar, movement, and would certainly have been aware of it; and as the community at Qumran may also have been part of this wider movement, it might be helpful to note the information supplied by Hippolytus in his Refutation of all Heresies.

Those who join the Essenes give their possessions to the community and they are then shared out according to need. Those who are to be admitted to the community are not anointed with oil because they consider oil to be a defiling element. Instead, they are given white clothes to wear like those worn by the other members of the sect. (Refutatio IX 19. Hippolytus, ed. P. Wendland, G.C.S. 3, p. 256)

Members of the sect do not live together in one large community but are to be found in every town, (Ref. IX 20. *ibid*, p. 256) unlike members of the Qumran community. They live very ordered lives from early in the morning and working until the fifth hour when they gather together in one place for the daily ritual washing in cold water after which they go together to eat breakfast. For this meal they wear linen garments which they regard as sacred, and after the meal with its blessings and hymns of praise they change again into their ordinary working clothes. The supper is eaten in a similar manner (Ref. IX 21. *ibid*, p. 257).

Those wishing to join the community are tested before being admitted, and have to live apart from members of the sect for a year, eating the same food and wearing a white robe or a linen girdle, presumably for the ablutions and the meals. At the end of this time, if their behaviour has been satisfactory, they are "washed more purely than before", but Hippolytus does not give details of this rite. The candidate, however, still does not eat with the other Essenes since he must prove himself suitable for two years, and only at the end of this period is he admitted as a member of the sect. Before the candidate can eat with them he has to swear an oath: to worship God; to deal justly with men; that he will hate no one and will keep faith with all, especially rulers, for those in authority are placed there by God; he must love the truth and reproach anyone who is guilty of falsehood; he must not steal nor pollute his conscience for his own gain; he must not speak of what he has learned to anyone outside the sect even though he is tortured to death, but he must conceal nothing from his fellow members and he must not give a distorted account of his knowledge to anyone (Ref. IX 23. *ibid*, p. 258f.). Anyone who breaks this oath is expelled from the community, and since he can no longer eat with them an expelled member sometimes died of starvation (Ref. IX 24. *ibid*, p. 259). A further piece of information supplied by Hippolytus is that the Pharisees are a form of Essenes but that they marry and their wives participate in the ritual ablutions with the men (Ref. IX 28. *ibid*, p. 261).

5.

THE DIDACHE: does the Didache truly reflect the Christian attitude towards and practice of the baptismal rite, as prevalent in its own time ?

## The Didache: A Source Study

Before attempting to answer, directly, the question under consideration, it seems essential to establish as clear a picture as possible of the document commonly known as the "Didache". It will first be necessary to make reference to some of the many problems raised by this piece of writing. It is important to see that there is little agreement among scholars in finding solutions to these, and, therefore, in commenting on the text of the Didache it will be impossible to take into account all these different viewpoints, and so it seems best to mention some of them at this point.

There appear to be seven main problems raised by this document:

- i) The relationship between the Two Ways in the Didache and the forms of the same moral code found in Barnabas and other writings. There are several possible explanations.
- ii) The Church Order found in chapters 7-15 is very important in that it shows a very primitive stage of the Church's development, yet at times it is very developed. What is the explanation of this ?
- iii) What exactly does the Didache deal with in chapters 9,10,14 ? It could be the Eucharist in all these chapters; the agape and Eucharist in 9 and 10; the Eucharist alone in 14; the agape alone in 14, or the undivided family meal in all three. We could assume that 9 and 10 are private prayers for the use of the

worshipper or that they are prayers for use at a private Eucharist: 14 being regulations for the public celebration.

iv) What stage in the history of the evolution of the ministry is represented by the Didache's chapters on apostles, prophets and teachers, and on bishops and deacons ?

v) What historical movements in Church history, if any, are referred to in the Didache, or why are none referred to ?

vi) How much of the New Testament does the Didache know ?

vii) Is the Didache a complete original document or is it a collection of books ?

There does not seem to be one generally accepted answer to any one of these questions. Then there are the many different opinions regarding the value of the Didache, its historical setting, and the individual sections and references: a controversy which has been going on since 1883 when the Didache was first published by Philotheos Bryennios.

In 1912 and later in 1920 J.A. Robinson put forward the view that the letter of Barnabas was written before the Didache,<sup>1</sup> a view which was supported by R.H. Connolly and Dr.J. Muilenburg<sup>2</sup> and also by F.E. Vokes<sup>3</sup>. This view sees the Didache as a collection of passages from earlier sources and Vokes<sup>4</sup> regarded it as a work of the end of the second century or of the beginning of the third. Schaff<sup>5</sup>, on the other hand, thought it to be one of the oldest, if not the oldest of the post-Apostolic writings: everything in it could have been written between 70 and

100AD., and considered it to have been written after the deaths of the Apostles: John possibly lived until around 98AD., and so Schaff gave a possible dating of 90 to 100AD.

Cyril Richardson <sup>6</sup> had little doubt that it was a second century document. His reason for giving this date was that the Didachist shows a knowledge of Matthew, Luke and the Shepherd of Hermas, which was written around 100AD. Daniélou and Audet <sup>7</sup>, however, are in agreement when they date it as early as 60AD and so rule out any later dating. They consider it, beyond doubt, to be a Jewish Christian work, dismissing totally Vokes' <sup>8</sup> theory of Didache as a Montanist work. The Two Ways, the liturgical section of the Didache and the place given to prophets within the work are indications of the Jewish influence on the Didache.

The Qumran Rule of the Community has within it instructions very similar to those found in Didache's section on the Two Ways and Daniélou points out that "the literary genre of the Didache as a whole is akin to the Essene Rule" <sup>9</sup>. The instruction to baptise in living water is also a feature which helps demonstrate the Jewish Christian nature of the work and Benoit said of this baptism that it was "a Jewish rite tinged with Christianity" <sup>10</sup>. Prayer three times a day as instructed by Didache was part of the discipline of the Qumran community too <sup>11</sup>, while the prayers of blessing (9,10), speaking of the Vine of David, using PAIS for Jesus, and tabernacling

the Name, probably come from old epiclesis, despite the fact that their use in Didache cannot be proved to be eucharistic <sup>12</sup>. The Marana tha which is found at the end of the final blessing (10) was an important part of the primitive Aramaic Jerusalem liturgy <sup>13</sup>, and prophets also are very much a part of the Jewish Christian tradition: the later writing, the Ascension of Isaiah speaks of the decline of the prophetic office <sup>14</sup>, and prophets are to be found in the Shepherd of Hermas <sup>15</sup>.

Daniélou sees close similarities between Didache and Essene texts <sup>16</sup> in the Two Ways, the three hours of prayer, baptism in living water and the prophets ( he points out that Josephus states that the Essenes were the only Jewish sect which maintained the prophetic office in the first century AD. <sup>17</sup> Daniélou sees two distinct stages of Essene-Christian relations:

a) in the early years, before 70AD. the Jerusalem Christian community copied the external observances of the Essenes;  
b) after 70AD. the influence became more specific. For example, the Christian additions to and perhaps collection of the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs and the remodelling of the Sybilline Oracles <sup>18</sup>. The influence on the Didache, he says, is the former <sup>19</sup>.

Because Essenism influenced in this way all of early Christianity, the date of the original form of the Didache would appear to be as early as the first Christian community in Jerusalem, although it is certain that it was developed further after 70AD. in a Syrian city.

Daniélou, therefore, concludes that Didache "is possibly the most venerable surviving document of Jewish Christian literature <sup>20</sup>.

As regards the place of origin of the Didache, Daniélou can see this only as Syria <sup>21</sup>, but Schaff gave four possible places of origin <sup>22</sup>: Alexandria, because Didache seemed to have been first known and quoted by Clement of Alexandria, but he saw nothing against Syria in general or Antioch in particular and also mentioned Jerusalem because of the use made of Matthew's Gospel. In support of Alexandria he cited Bryennios, Zahn and Harnack as holding this view <sup>23</sup>:

a) the Two Ways was in circulation there and the Letter of Barnabas and the Apostolic Church Order came from that area, in addition to which there was the possibility that Clement of Alexandria knew the Didache <sup>24</sup>.

b) The teaching's liberal attitude towards New Testament canon: apparently it included Barnabas and Hermas, which also suggested to them Alexandria.

c) Until the fourth century the Didache itself was almost included in the canon in Egypt, and Athanasius recommended it as being suitable for the instruction of catechumens.

d) Sarapion of Thmuis (4th. century) has a quotation from the Didache in his Eucharistic prayer.

Cyril Richardson <sup>25</sup> saw the Didache as the work of an Alexandrian scribe but believed that the source of the document could well lie in Antioch

Daniélou has three reasons for his conclusion that it

must be Syrian in origin:<sup>26</sup>

- a) until the fourth century it existed alongside the Didascalia and the Apostolic Constitutions;
  - b) Hosanna, Marana tha, and Amen are Aramaic phrases which most probably originated in Syria and from there spread to other places;
  - c) there are many similarities between Didache and the Ascension of Isaiah which is itself of Syrian origin.
- He does not, however rule out the possibility that the earliest origins of Didache are to be traced to Palestine and to before the year 70AD.

An early dating is further supported by the doctrinal attitude of the Didache. It does not contain any specific Christian doctrines and is dominated by its moral concern. Christianity is seen as a pure, holy life based on the teaching and example of Christ. It agrees in this with the letter of James, the letter of Polycarp and the writings of Justin Martyr. Pliny too describes the morality of the Bithynian Christians. On the whole it ignores the theology of John and Paul, and it does not have the doctrinal content of some of the other Post-apostolic writings. The writer does not place any emphasis on the concept of one God, nor does he explain or expand the command to love God. The only statements made about the character of God are that he is the Creator, the Almighty Ruler, our Father in heaven and so on. This suggests that Didache pre-dates the writing of John's Gospel and that, in its earliest form at least, it was written before the letters of Paul had gained anything



like universal importance, and also before the development of formal Christian doctrine.

With a dating as early as modern scholarship would now support, the picture which the Didache gives us of the worshipping life of an early Christian community is extremely valuable. In this document we have not only a very early baptismal order but also a description of the whole worship scene of which baptism was a part.

On the Lord's Day the congregation was to assemble and break bread. Reading of Scripture is not even mentioned, although it is possible that the use of the Old Testament was taken for granted (and of such "New Testament" writings as were then available). Wednesdays and Fridays were the days on which Christians were to fast, rather than on Mondays and Thursdays which were the Jewish fast days. Annual Church festivals, not even Easter, enter this picture, although Easter was observed as the Christian Passover in the time of Polycarp of Smyrna <sup>27</sup>.

Prayer and fasting were prescribed. The Lord's Prayer was to be recited three times a day, probably in imitation of the Jewish hours of devotion at nine, twelve and three. Tertullian later added the morning and evening prayers. The Lord's Prayer is as in Matthew, with a slight alteration, and this is probably the oldest authority for the use of this prayer in the Church's worship. There is also the prescription to fast before baptism (7:4), as well as on Wednesday and Friday, which goes beyond New Testament teaching.

This is the setting into which the baptismal rite fits, taking place after instruction in the Way of Life and the Way of Death. This instruction before baptism was essential as is made clear by Didache which sets out the Two Ways and then speaks of baptism which is to be administered after the teaching of these two ways (7:1). In Acts 8:35-36, Philip explains only a chapter of Isaiah and then baptises the eunuch. This early rite and others like it do not appear to have been particularly influenced by Judaism but the influence emerges as the rite becomes more organised, as in Didache. Daniélou offers two possible origins for the preparatory stage of the Didache rite:

- a) Proselyte baptism which had preparatory instruction, but there is little information about this;
- b) the initiation ritual of the Zadokite order which is detailed in the "Rule of the Community": the person who wants to enter the community is to be instructed for a year and if, after that, he is accepted he receives the ritual bath <sup>28</sup>.

The content of the catechetical instruction is of great importance for Daniélou in establishing the Jewish Christian nature of this practice <sup>29</sup>. He concludes that the instructions of Didache, of 1 Clement, of the Paedagogus of Clement of Alexandria, of 1 Peter, of the Clementine Homilies, all belong to a standard baptismal instruction whose contents are either Jewish Christian or Jewish with Gospel material added and presented in Jewish forms. He concludes that a Christian catechesis

existed in Apostolic times, elements of which are contained in 1 Peter and the letters of Paul, but later, in order to achieve uniformity, Jewish Christians employed the shape of the Jewish teaching of the Two Ways, while the content of this teaching had probably already influenced the content of the Christian catechesis.

Another element of the preparation for baptism was the fast: the person to be baptised, and as many others who could were to fast for a day or two before the baptism (7:4). Justin<sup>30</sup> also instructed candidates to fast and this was "for the remission of their sins..... we praying and fasting with them". Conversion to Judaism included the necessity to fast, for "Judaism attributed to fasting the power of casting out devils", says Benoit<sup>31</sup> and, "this would bring us to the origins of the later baptismal exorcism".

The basic pattern of the preparation for baptism is to be found in the Qumran "Rule of the Community", but, says Daniélou<sup>32</sup>, this does not mean that the rite itself was related to that of Qumran, only that the early Jewish Christians borrowed the Qumran pattern when they sought to establish a pre-baptismal catechetical system.

The baptismal rite itself was to be administered in the name of the Trinity and the normal method was threefold immersion in running water (7:1-3). Both the baptismal formula and the triple immersion are purely Christian, although immersion was also the method of proselyte baptism and of the Qumran bath, and it was also found in the rites of pagan cults. The preferred method of

baptism in living water, in a river or stream (as in Acts 8:36), is found also in the Clementine Recognitions VI 15 and in the Odes of Solomon XXX 1, but Didache allows three exceptions to this:

- a) baptism by immersion "into other water" (EIS ALLO HUDŌR): any kind of cold water in pools or cisterns.
- b) Baptism by immersion in warm water when the health of the candidate or the climate of the season demanded it.
- c) Threefold aspersion of the head where no other water was available in sufficient quantity for total or partial immersion. This is the oldest extant evidence for pouring or aspersion.

In this description of baptism there is no mention of exorcism or of the application of salt, oil, or other material which accompanied it in the second and third centuries.

The Eucharist immediately followed baptism and only those who had been baptised can participate, which is a form of exclusivism similar to that which applies to the Jewish Passover meal. In the description of the Eucharist there are three prayers of thanksgiving:<sup>33</sup> for the cup, the broken bread, and for all God's gifts along with prayer for the Church, and between the second and third prayers is the warning against the admission of unbaptised persons to the eucharistic meal. Admission to the Passover meal is prohibited to those who are uncircumcised.

The third section of the Didache deals with Church politics and discipline. It sets out the various classes of ministers in 11 - 13 and 15. In the development of

its organisation it is between the Pastoral letters and the establishment of the episcopacy: between Paul and Ignatius. Apostolic government is about to cease and episcopal government has not yet taken its place, so organisation is still free and there is no apparent centre or source of influence. For example, Jerusalem, Ephesus, Antioch, Rome, are not mentioned. There is nothing of the primacy of Peter and no creed or rule of faith is required as a condition of membership, other than what is taught in the Two Ways. The undeveloped nature of its organisation would correspond with the undeveloped nature of the baptismal rite which it describes and emphasises the fact that the Didache is a document which originated in a very early Christian community.

#### The Didache and Other Documents

The Didachist speaks very briefly about the actual baptismal liturgy, as do all of the early writers. Therefore, it would, for example, be very difficult to give any detailed consideration to a comparison of Matthew's baptismal practice and attitude with Didache's baptismal practice and attitude since the references to baptism in Matthew's Gospel are even more brief than those found in Didache. However, if it could be shown that Didache, Matthew, and others are in general agreement then we might assume that they agree also in their baptismal practices. This study will not, therefore, be confined to baptismal references alone, but will rather try to demonstrate Didache's relation to other

writings of the same period.

The writer claimed to be passing on the teaching which had been given to the Twelve Apostles:

"The teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles". 34

This longer title may well be drawn from the commission in Matthew 28:19f., although the actual wording comes from Acts 2:42<sup>35</sup>. Also drawn from Matthew is the baptismal formula found at the beginning of the second section of Didache:

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". (Matt. 28:19f.)

Didache 1:3b and 2:1 has quite a lot of material found also in the Sermon on the Mount. The quotations, however, are not exact, possibly because the writer does not intend to quote Jesus word for word but rather to record the teaching passed on to the Gentiles by the Apostles.

Didache 6:

"If you can shoulder the Lord's yoke in its entirety, then you will be perfect; but if that is too much for you, do as much as you can".

The meat of idols, however, must be avoided. This is similar to Matthew 5:48 and 19:21, but in Matthew there is no reference to the possibility of the Christian being able to adopt a lower standard of behaviour, although, in Acts 15:10-28, the Jerusalem conference did not want to place on the Gentiles a burden, or yoke, which was too heavy for the Jews themselves who had always been accustomed to it, but the Christian Gentiles must at least abstain from meat which had been

offered to idols. (The term "yoke" is used also in Matthew 11:29) In Acts there are not really two levels of conduct for Christians: it is much more a distinction between Jewish converts and Gentile converts. It could be that this was what the Didachist had in mind: making an allowance for Gentile converts who would find the restrictions much more difficult than their Jewish counterparts. Even if this was not in the writer's mind, there is a similarity between the two ideas.

The general image of the Didache is that it has little to do with the Pauline and Johannine teaching and theology <sup>36</sup>, but there are areas in which similarities do emerge. For example, in Paul, I Corinthians 7:25-40, there are a number of cases in which he admits two possible levels of action, and in chapter 8 he too discourages the eating of meat offered to idols.

The subsequent major sections of the Didache open in a form identical to that employed by Paul in I Corinthians:

- PERI DE HŌN EGRAPSATE.....(7:1)
- PERI DE TŌN PARTHENŌN.....(7:25)
- PERI DE TŌN EIDŌLOTHUTŌN.....(8:1)
- PERI DE TŌN PNEUMATIKŌN.....(12:1)
- PERI DE TĒS LOGIAS.....(16:1)
- PERI DE APOLLŌ TOU ADELPHOU.....(16:12)

The Didachist completes his treatment of the Two Ways and immediately begins his new sections:

- PERI DE TĒS BRŌSEŌS.....(6:3)
- PERI DE TOU BAPTISMATOS.....(7:1)

PERI DE TĒS EUCHARISTĒS.....(9:1)

And PRŌTON -

PERI TOU POTĒRIOU.....(9:2)

PERI DE TOU KLASMATOS.....(9:3)

PERI DE TŌN APOSTOLŌN KAI PROPHĒTŌN....(11:2) <sup>37</sup>

This parallelism would suggest that the Didachist was pursuing a line of thought similar to that of Paul, in terms of conveying his instructions to the Church. The linguistic similarity, at least, is undeniable.

The Didachist mentions only two Christian rites: baptism and Eucharist.

#### Baptism

The instructions for baptism mark the beginning of the next main section. The first section was probably the teaching given by the Apostles, and those who followed, to candidates (ie. Gentile converts) coming for baptism. As already noted, the formula used is that which is given in Matthew 28:19. It may be that the "living water", which is to be preferred, is a term coming from John's gospel, or from a source known also to the writer of that gospel.

The next oldest description of baptism is to be found in the first Apology of Justin. Apology I:61 speaks of a regeneration in baptism, of remission of sins, and of being born again so as to enter the Kingdom, and none of these is to be found in Didache. Justin's, "As many



as are persuaded and believe.....", is similar to Didache, as is the period of preparation, but on the whole Justin's description is of a much more developed concept of baptism.

It is worth noting that in Didache's account of the baptismal rite there is no mention of infant baptism and that the period of instruction and the directions to fast obviously apply to adult candidates. This would correspond with the direct references to baptism found in the New Testament, and also with the practice of Qumran and the other baptist sects, and with the rite known in the letter of Barnabas where the instruction given is also clearly meant for adults. Another point of interest is the administration of the rite in the name of the Trinity, as in Matthew, making no use of the formula, "in the name of Jesus", which is the normal New Testament form. The immersion of the candidate three times in "living water" would correspond with the baptism of Jesus in so far as he was baptised in the running water of the River Jordan, apparently by immersion, though not a triple immersion, which would have had no significance at that time. Catacomb pictures of baptismal rites showing candidates standing in the water seem to support the description given by the Didache. Justin too seems to have had a river or stream in mind when he stated that the candidates were led to the water: presumably to a place which had sufficient water for immersion, which was more than would have been available in a house.

Different from the New Testament is Didache's prescription to fast (7:4) before baptism, although Jesus fasted after his baptism <sup>38</sup>. Fasting is, however found in Justin and Tertullian <sup>39</sup>. Also like Tertullian and Justin, Didache's administration of baptism is not restricted to any one class of people such as bishops or presbyters <sup>40</sup>.

Tertullian specifically states that anyone can administer the rite when a bishop or presbyter is not available.

Didache <sup>41</sup> does not suggest that bishops and presbyters have the primary right to do so, and in the New Testament there is no restriction either, although sometimes the Spirit is not received until the laying on of hands by the disciples. It should also be noted that the Didache does not mention the receiving of the Spirit.

While the description given of baptism in Didache indicates the development of a formalised practice there is as yet no sign of exorcism, oil, salt, which were to become an integral part of later baptismal rites but which are not to be found in the New Testament, at least not in connection with baptism.

### The Eucharist

In 9:1, Didache places the Cup before the bread in the celebration of the Eucharist, which is unusual and yet Paul also does this in 1 Corinthians 10:16,17. The only other place in which they are taken in this order is in Luke 22:14f. However, after this one usage The Didachist returns to the normal order, as does Paul in 11:28.

Another unusual feature is that KLASMA is used of "bread"

instead of ARTOS. KLASMATA (the plural) is used in all the Gospels for the fragments of bread and fish left over after the multitude had been fed. John sees this event as a symbol of the Last Supper <sup>42</sup>, and he uses KLASMATA twice in this section. The language of the Didache (and the practice it records) is thus in keeping with other writings of the same period. Further evidence of this can be seen in Didache 9:5 which forbids the presence of unbaptised persons at the Eucharist, for a similar attitude is to be found in Matthew 6:13, 24:31, 25:34 and in the first letter of John 4:18, which have: "He who is holy, let him come. He who is not.....", and in I Corinthians 16:22, Paul has: "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed"<sup>43</sup>.

The section immediately following on that of the Eucharist warns against false missionaries and charismatists in much the same way as Paul does in 2 Corinthians II:9f., with the Didachist instructing: <sup>44</sup>

"You must, then, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons", which is Paul's terminology for Church orders in Philippians I:1 ("bishops and deacons"), and there are similar references in the Pastoral letters, again showing Didache to be in accord with its near contemporaries.

#### The Church Orders

Didache has five orders: apostles, prophets, teachers, bishops and deacons. Acts has: apostles, prophets, teachers (I3:1); evangelists (2I:8); presbyters (bishops), elders (II:30; I4:23; I5:2, 4, 4, 22, 23; I6:4; 20:I7, 28; 2I:I8; 23:I4; 24:I; 25:I5); in Jerusalem there are

deacons or "the Seven" (6:3; 2I:8). Paul mentions apostles, prophets, teachers (I Cor. I2:28). In Ephesians are added evangelists and pastors. James speaks of teachers (3:I), and elders (5:I4). I Peter 5:I-4 has elders.

Didache is thus the stage of development after the New Testament, using the same orders as recorded there although by this time they seem to have become more formalised. They are not, however, as developed as in Ignatius, Irenaeus and Tertullian.

Although Didache does not correspond totally with any other work of the period, it shows sufficient similarity in thought, practice and language to indicate that it is very much a product of its own time, following the general pattern of Christian writing of the period.

The material on Christian baptism during this period is limited, but since the Didache corresponds so closely with the New Testament and Post-apostolic writings on all other matters, we might with relative confidence make the assumption that its account of baptism does reflect the Christian attitude towards and practice of the rite at this early stage in the history of the Church.

## NOTES

1. J.T.S. XIII 1912, p. 339-56, and: Barnabas, Hermas and Didache, Donnellan Lectures, 1920.
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3. F.E. Vokes, The Riddle of the Didache, London 1938.
4. *ibid.* p. 61, 87, 216.
5. P. Schaff, The Oldest Church Manual, Edinburgh 1885, p. 119f.
6. C.C. Richardson, Early Christian Fathers vol.I, London 1953, p. 166.
7. J. Daniélou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity, London 1964, p. 28f., and J.P. Audet, La Didachè, Instructions des Apôtres, Paris 1958, p. 207, 209.
8. Vokes, *op.cit.*, p. 129-146.
9. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
10. A. Benoit, Le baptême chrétien au second siècle, Paris 1953, p. 31.
11. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
12. *ibid.* p. 29, and Audet, *op. cit.*, p. 219.
13. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
14. Ascension of Isaiah III 27.
15. Mand. XI 7-9.
16. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
17. *ibid.* p. 30.
18. *ibid.* p. 14, 15, 17.
19. *ibid.* p. 30.
20. *ibid.* p. 30.
21. *ibid.* p. 29.

22. Schaff, op. cit., p. I23f.
23. *ibid.* p. I23f.
24. F.R.M. Hitchcock, J.T.S. XXIV, 1923. p. 399f.
25. Richardson, op. cit., p. I66.
26. Daniélou, op. cit., p. 29.
27. Before 155AD. (Eusebius H.E. V. 24. Ed. E. Schwartz, G.C.S. II 2. Leipzig, 1908.)
28. Daniélou, op. cit., p. 317. (Rule of Community VI I3-23. cf. III 9.)
29. *ibid.* p. 317-319.
30. Justin, Apology I LXI 2.
31. Benoit, op. cit., p.II. cf. Daniélou, op. cit., p. 320.
32. Daniélou, op. cit., p. 323.
33. Didache 9.
34. *ie.* The remaining eleven plus Matthias, making twelve.
35. ".... the apostles' teaching and fellowship,....".
36. See p.I0I above,
37. J.A. Robinson, Barnabas, Hermas and the Didache. (Donnellan Lectures) London, 1920. p. 90.
38. Matt. 4:2.
39. Justin, Apology I LXI, and Tertullian, De Bapt. XVIII.
40. Justin, Apology I LXIf., and Tertullian, De Bapt. XVII.
41. Didache 7.
42. John 6:3f.
43. For a detailed comparative study, see Audet, op. cit., p. I73f.
44. Gr. EPISKOPOI and DIAKONOI: Bishops and Deacons. Didache I5.

6.

SECOND CENTURY BAPTISM

The following are passages, written by second century authors, which contain references to baptism, and, therefore, help to set the scene of the second century practice of the baptismal rite.

Barnabas: "Let us inquire if the Lord was careful to make a revelation in advance concerning the water and the cross. Concerning the water it was written with regard to Israel how they will not receive the baptism which brings forgiveness of sins but will supply another for themselves..... Blessed are those who placed their hope in his cross and descended into the water..... We descend into the water full of sins and uncleanness, and we ascend bearing reverence in our heart and having hope in Jesus in our spirit."

( 2 . I, 8, II)

Hermas: "The tower which you seeing being built is myself, the church..... Hear then why the tower has been built on the waters. Your life was saved and will be saved through water. The tower has been founded by the pronouncement of his almighty and glorious name, and it is supported by the invisible power of the Master."

(Vision 3 iii 3)

"I have heard, Sir, from some teachers that there is no other repentance except that one when we descended into the water and received the forgiveness of our former sins." He said to me, "You heard correctly, for it is so. He who has received forgiveness of sins ought to sin no more but to live in purity."

(Mandate 4 iii I)

"Therefore, these also who have fallen asleep received the seal of the Son of God and 'entered the kingdom of God'..... The seal then is the water..... These apostles and teachers who preached the name of the Son of God, preached also to those who had fallen asleep before them and gave to them the seal of the preaching. They descended therefore with them into the water and ascended again. The former went down alive and came up alive, but the latter who had fallen asleep previously went down dead but came up alive."

(Similitudes 9 xvi 3-6)

Didache: "Concerning baptism, baptise in this way. After you have spoken all these things, 'baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit', in running water. If you do not have running water baptise in other water. If you are not able in cold, then in warm. If you do not have either, pour out water three times on the head, 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'.



Before the baptism the one baptising and the one being baptised are to fast, and any others who are able. Command the one being baptised to fast a day or two beforehand."

(7)

Justin: "As many as are persuaded and believe that the things taught and said by us are true and promise to be able to live accordingly are taught to fast, pray and ask God for the forgiveness of past sins, while we pray and fast with them. Then they are led by us to where there is water, and in the manner of the regeneration by which we ourselves were regenerated they are regenerated. For at that time they obtain for themselves the washing in water in the name of God the Master of all and Father, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. For Christ also said, 'Unless you are regenerated, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven'."

(Apology I.6I)

"For Christ, being 'the firstborn of all creation', became also the beginning again of another race, who were born again by him through water, faith, and wood (that is, the mystery of the cross)."

(Dialogue I38.2)

(The sources quoted above and in the rest of this section of work, are taken from the translations of Everett Ferguson in his work "Early Christians Speak". Texas, 1971.)

These early writings show that baptism marked the point at which those who believed and repented of their sins were regarded as having been finally converted to the Christian faith. They show that it was usually administered by immersion into water, and that it came to be believed that this act of baptism had the power to convey forgiveness of sins. Only a few far-out Gnostic sects did not

believe that baptism, or the forgiveness of sins, was necessary.

That immersion was the normal method is testified to by Barnabas II:

"We descend into the water.....and ascend";

and by Hermas, Similitudes 9. 16:

"They descended with them into the water and ascended again".

Justin probably points to this method also, in Apology 1:61, when he says:

"They are led by us to where there is water".

Didache 7 and Justin, Apology 1:61, are the only second century writers to provide an order for the administration of baptism during this period:

a) There is a time of instruction which precedes baptism, and this instruction is mainly concerned with the moral aspects of the Christian life.

b) A preparatory period of prayer and fasting emphasised the seriousness of the step being taken and the solemnity of the rite.

c) An administrator is necessary and some witnesses would also be present.

d) Baptism was administered to those who believed and repented.

e) Didache, Justin, and later Irenaeus, all give the baptismal formula:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit",

as in Matthew 28:19. The formula may have taken an

interrogatory rather than a declaratory form, but at this stage it is not clear which it is.

f) A confession of the candidate's faith in Christ is essential and references to this are to be found in all statements about baptism and its meaning.

g) Baptism is seen as the point at which one turns from the old sinful life of the past, and promises to live according to Christian teaching in Christ's Way.

In writings of the period from Didache to Justin we find that baptism and the cross are closely linked: as in Barnabas and Justin, and also in Ignatius, Ephesians 18:2:

"For our God Jesus Christ..... was born and was baptised in order that he might purify the water by his passion".

That this link is important is clear from the preference for the Paschal season as the time for the administration of baptism.

These early writers believed that the rite gave: forgiveness of sins, salvation, illumination, eternal life, regeneration, and, later, the Holy Spirit. Hermas states that the dead had to receive baptism before they could achieve eternal life, demonstrating how important is baptism, and which is possibly a development of the idea in John 3:5:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God".

Since all writers are equally emphatic on this point of the efficacy of baptism in the forgiveness of sins and the achieving of eternal life, it was obviously an important aspect of the rite from very early times.

The idea of new birth is another important aspect of the rite in the second century Church. The reference in John's Gospel is clearly seen as a baptismal one, certainly in Hermas and Justin, and the imagery of John is used throughout the early writings to show the meaning of baptism, which is seen as being quite different from the Jewish washings.

### Ignatius

Fifteen letters bear the name of Ignatius as their author, and of these eight were almost certainly written after the time of Ignatius himself. Very little is known about him and the main source of information is the record of his martyrdom, while Polycarp mentions him in his letter to the Philippians (ix), and writes of his letters in chapter xiii. Irenaeus quotes from his letter to the Romans (Adv. Haer. V:28 and Epist. ad Roman. IV), but does not even name Ignatius. Origen has two references to him: in the preface to his commentary on the Song of Solomon he quotes part of the letter to the Romans, and in his Sixth Homily on Luke he quotes the letter to the Ephesians, and in both references he does name the author.

From his letters and from the account of his martyrdom we can get a very limited picture of Ignatius. He was Bishop of Antioch, and when Trajan went on his first expedition against the Parthians and the Armenians<sup>1</sup> Ignatius voluntarily came before him, confessed himself

a Christian and was sentenced to death ( to the lions). After a long journey by sea he arrived at Smyrna where Polycarp was the bishop, and it was from here that he wrote four letters: to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, and Romans. From Smyrna he went to Troas where he stayed for a few days, and there wrote to the Philadelphians, Smyrneans, and to Polycarp. He went on to Neapolis and then through Macedonia. Eventually he arrived, by sea, in Italy and was taken to Rome where he died on 20th. December 107 (some say 116).<sup>2</sup>

The text of his letters provides a picture of the Church as it was maturing during the second century: the Church in which the baptismal practice was developing and becoming a formalised rite. In every letter he urges obedience to the bishop, presbyters and deacons. Always, there is only one bishop who is to be "regarded as we would regard Christ himself" (Ephes. 6), who thus has considerable authority, and clearly is placed at the top of a hierarchical scale. His references to "presbytery" (Trall. 7, Ephes. 4, et al) suggest that the order of presbyters has also become quite formalised and has its own structure through which to work, while he places the deacons a little lower on the scale without giving any clear definition of their duties. There is no reference to Apostles or to any travelling ministry, nor to prophets or charismatics ( which are to be found in Didache). Obedience to the law of God is equated with obedience to these orders of the Church (Trall, 13). In the letter to the Philadelphians he

makes it clear that there is only one bishop for each congregation, and chapter 10 demonstrates that there was communication between individual churches in different areas: the churches are to send an "ambassador" to Antioch in Syria - some are sending a bishop while others are sending presbyters or deacons.

In the letter to the Smyrneans there is increasing concern with the way Christian rites are administered:

"Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper eucharist which is (administered) either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it".

"It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptise or to celebrate a love feast; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God, so that everything that is done may be secure and valid."

(8)

This increased concern is possibly due to the Christian Church beginning to establish more firmly its identity as being independent of any other religion or sect.

Also in these references can be seen again the immense power which was being placed in the hands of the bishop.

From these letters emerges the picture of a much more developed church than that found in Didache or in any other writings of the period, and it is this general development which was beginning to take place within the church which provides the setting for an increasingly complex baptismal rite.

#### Infant Baptism

Hermas: "Those who believed are such as these: They are

like innocent infants, in whose heart no wickedness enters and who do not know what evil is but always remain innocent (ie. "in innocence").

.....for all infants are honoured before God and are in the first rank before him."

(Similitudes 9 XXIX 1-3. cf. 9 XXXI 3)

Barnabas: "Since he renewed us in the forgiveness of sins, he made us into another image, so as to have the soul of children, as if he were indeed refashioning us."  
(6. 11)

Aristides: "And when a child has been born to one of them (Christians) they give thanks to God; and if it should die as an infant, they give thanks the more, because it has departed sinless."  
(Apology 15. 11)

These writers clearly believe that infants are innocent, and that this, therefore, is the ideal state for believers. The earliest writing to mention infant baptism is Irenaeus followed by Tertullian, and tombstone inscriptions which seem to refer to infant baptism are also later, usually dating from the middle of the third century.

The opinion of the early Christians thus seems to have been that infants have no guilt: with which Tertullian would no doubt have agreed. Aristides gives the clearest evidence of belief in their guiltlessness. He does not suggest that the child has become guiltless through baptism, but rather that it was born innocent ( although Jeremias says that this is due to baptism). The Christian is to try to return to this state of innocence. Clement of Alexandria later said that "even the seed of the sanctified is holy" (ie. the children of Christians). Since baptism was for the remission of sins, and since the early Church saw infants as being without sin, there

would have been no point in baptising infants.

Irenaeus (Against Heresies II xxii. 4) is probably the earliest witness to the infant rite, although the Martyrdom of Polycarp (9:3) has been cited as earlier evidence. Polycarp is recorded as saying at his trial: "Eighty six years have I served my King".

The legendary "Life of Polycarp" does not mention his baptism, but says that he was bought by a Christian woman who brought him up. The inference is that he would not have been baptised as an infant. The reference to "eighty six years" could simply be his age and that he had served God all his life. He may not have considered baptism as necessary before one could serve God. If the statement were taken as a reference to infant baptism it would place the practice very early - before 90AD., which seems too early a dating to be likely, since it is not mentioned by Didache, Barnabas, or Hermas.<sup>3</sup>

Jeremias <sup>4</sup> argues that the Martyrdom of Polycarp provides evidence for infant baptism, and his dating would place the rite back around 80AD., which, as stated, would be extremely unlikely. He also refers <sup>5</sup> to Pliny's letter which speaks of teneri and robustiores which he would translate, "young" and "adults". However, the primary meaning of the Latin appears rather to be "weak" and "strong", and Pliny may not have been aware of the distinction between baptised and unbaptised persons, since both categories worshipped Christ.

During the reign of Hadrian (117-138AD.), Aristides of



Athens wrote an Apology. The first part (1-14) was a polemic against the pagan religions of the barbarians. The second part (15-17) contrasts Christianity with these other religions, placing considerable emphasis on Christian morality, and not explicitly speaking of the sacraments. Jeremias, however, sees a reference to baptism in 15:11: <sup>6</sup>

"And when a child is born to them they thank God; and if it die in infancy, they thank him exceedingly, because it has departed sinless".

Jeremias argues that this phrase, "they thank God", is used with reference to the sacrament of baptism. This argument seems weak since in 15:10 it is used of prayers in the morning and of the grace at meals. While in 15:12 it is twice used of a funeral service. He says that it is always used of Christian rites, but this does not necessarily seem to be the case, and even if it were so, the phrase does not have to suggest baptism here. Jeremias <sup>7</sup> also argues from the stance that early Christians would not have considered infants sinless from birth, therefore, if they depart this life without sin it is because they have been baptised, but the early writers show that this was not the belief of the Church of their time.

In Justin's first Apology, he sees further evidence of the infant rite <sup>8</sup>. Justin speaks of people of sixty and seventy who have been disciples since childhood.

EMATHĒTEUTHĒSAN is the verb translated "have been disciples".

Jeremias says that the passive of MATHĒTEUEIN is used of "becoming a Christian", and that in Dialogue 39:2 it is a clear reference to baptism. Therefore, the men and women referred to in the Apology must have

been baptised as children. This claim does not appear to be sufficiently substantiated:

a) Because *MATHĒTEUEIN* is used once elsewhere of baptism does not necessarily limit the usage to baptismal references.

b) Children may have been thought to have "become Christians" at the conversion of their parents, since:

c) It is not certain that in earliest times Christians had their children baptised. They may have considered their own baptism sufficient.

Another document in which Jeremias sees a reference to infant baptism is Aristides' Apology.<sup>9</sup> In 15:6, Aristides writes:

"Slaves, maidservants or children, if some of them have any, they persuade to become Christians".

But, does this mean that all were immediately baptised? Perhaps the children were not baptised until they were older. Or the reference may be to the older children and not to infants.

The factor which weighs against infant baptism most heavily is that on the understanding of the early Church about the sinlessness of young children their baptism would have been pointless.

#### Summary

The general pattern of Church organisation at the end of the first century (that is, in later New Testament and early Post-apostolic writings) was that the local

congregations were presided over by a number of bishops or elders and deacons who assisted them. In the second century, Ignatius of Antioch, writing to the churches of Asia Minor (c. 110Ad.), describes a threefold ministry of one bishop, several elders/presbyters, and deacons. Asia and Antioch seem to have had a system of one bishop early in the second century. Greece and the West did not have this so early: not until the second half of the second century.

During this period Gnosticism emerges as the first serious threat to Christianity after Judaism. Its concept of an evil world, its docetic faith, its lack of belief in the resurrection of the body, and its teaching that moral conduct was immaterial, were aspects of Gnosticism which threatened the unity of the Church. Notable among the Gnostics were Basilides of the early second century, who taught in Alexandria, and Valentinus of the mid-second century.

Another threat was Marcion, who was not a Gnostic. However, he threw out the whole of the Old Testament and much of what is now the canonical New Testament, and added some of his own material. In recognition of his efforts he was "disfellowshipped" by the Roman Church in 144.

At the end of the first century, Ephesus and Asia<sup>(and Antioch)</sup> were the main centres of Christianity, but by the end of the second century, Rome had replaced Ephesus.

## NOTES

1. According to legend.
2. W.H.C. Frend, *The Early Church*. London, 1971. p. 255. (I07AD); and J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius*. London, 1957. P. 402 (c. II5AD).
3. J. Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*. London, 1962. p. 59f.
4. J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 59f., and, *Origins of Infant Baptism*. London, 1963. p. 58f.
5. J. Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, p. 63f., and *Origins of Infant Baptism*, p. 58f.
6. *Origins of Infant Baptism*, p. 77, and, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, p. 71.
7. See for example, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, p. 71 and 98.
8. *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, p. 72, and *Origins of Infant Baptism*, p. 55-58.
9. *Origins of Infant Baptism*, p. 43-48.

II

NON-ORTHODOX SECTS

7.

GNOSTICISM AND BAPTISM

In its original usage, "Gnostic" would have been applied to individual sects or religious groups which would not have seen themselves as being any part of a larger movement. It is only in more modern usage that a whole group of heretical sects of the second century have been classified as "Gnostic" and regarded as part of one movement, thus relating them in a way which they themselves would never have considered, and it is in very modern thinking that the origins of Gnosticism have been sought somewhere other than in Greek philosophy, thus breaking with the tradition of Irenaeus and Hippolytus whose views on this have been accepted until quite recently.<sup>1</sup> Some have seen the origins of Gnosticism in the pre-Christian mythologies, while James<sup>2</sup> would place orthodox as well as heretical Christianity within the classification "Gnostic". It becomes clear, the more one considers Gnosticism and its sects, that it is not so easily defined and that the variety of applications of the term can cause considerable confusion. Before going on to speak of the Gnostics and their writings and practices it is, therefore, necessary to look at least briefly at the available information on the origin of Gnosticism.

The earliest documented evidence originates in the middle of the first century AD., in other words, in the New Testament period, although "Gnosticism" in its widest sense may be much older. However, in the sense more familiar to us, it seems to have developed during the same period as Christianity.

Their own writings and those of their critics show that the different Gnostic groups varied considerably in practice and belief, but what they all had in common was their syncretism: combining religion, philosophy and magic, and making any definition of their sects all the more difficult. Although characteristics can be found recurring in the different systems of thought, they do not appear to form any identifiable pattern.

Hellenistic thinkers believed that the universe was a series of concentric spheres above and around the earth and that each sphere was ruled by a minor deity who was associated with the planets and upon whom depended the fate of humanity. Platonic dualism was widely accepted with its ideal world, its world of senses, and its transcendent God. Also accepted was the Stoic idea of the soul as a spark of the divine fire imprisoned in matter. A combination of these resulted in a belief in the soul as part of the divine, but held captive in the material body from which it naturally sought to escape<sup>3</sup>, and whose escape was possible by various methods: the practice of asceticism; by obeying the divine element within oneself; by magical knowledge of the deities and of special words which would open the way to heaven; by vision and enlightenment which could make the one who experienced it a god; sometimes there was belief in a redeemer who descended in order to lead the soul upwards; or the soul might have to experience a series of reincarnations to atone for past sins; and those who held to the Stoic idea believed that the spark of the

soul is returned to the divine fire on the death of the body.<sup>4</sup>

Heaven and earth are seen as being very distant from one another, with the transcendent God dwelling in heaven far from the corrupt material world. The soul belongs to heaven while the world, the body, flesh, matter, are all evil, and the only ones who can be saved from this evil are those few to whom God has given knowledge. Some groups believed that if they had this knowledge it made no difference how they lived, but others believed that strict asceticism was necessary.<sup>5</sup>

Such thought came from the Hellenistic society of the time and ideas from other sources were added. Little of their thinking seems to have come from Judaism, although Jews in the Diaspora had adopted some aspects of Hellenistic thought, thus forming an indirect link between Hellenism and early Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Some "gnostic"-type ideas can be found in Paul and in Philo, but Paul never goes all the way to Gnosticism, just as Philo never abandons Judaism in its favour, and it could be that it was not so much Paul and Philo following Gnostic thought as the Gnostics borrowing ideas from them<sup>7</sup>. In his writings Philo tries to show that Judaism is the true "gnosis" - knowledge - given by God to Moses and passed on to all generations of the people of Israel. Wilson says:

"We cannot, however, call him a Gnostic; his importance lies in the fact that he shows the type of thought



current in his time, and provides a link in the chain which unites the later movements with earlier thought" <sup>8</sup>.

### The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls also contain Gnostic elements, or at least ideas and terminology later used by the Gnostics<sup>9</sup>, which does not necessarily mean that they were employed at Qumran in the same way as they were used by the later sects.

a) Like the Old Testament Wisdom literature, the Scrolls strongly emphasise knowledge, and may well be no more Gnostic than is the Old Testament literature.

b) As in Gnosticism, knowledge is given to only a small select group, but:

c) The knowledge in the Scrolls is knowledge of God and his creativity, his laws, and prophecy and fulfillment, which is not the kind of knowledge normally sought by the Gnostic groups.

d) Burrows points out that the Scrolls and fragments do not use the idea of the soul as a divine spark imprisoned in matter, and that there is not any evidence of the Gnostic myth of the divine Redeemer.<sup>10</sup> It is, in any case, possible that the concept of the Redeemer was taken into Gnostic thought under the influence of Christianity.

Many ideas and much of the terminology of the Scrolls are similar to those found in Gnostic literature and thought, and may in fact have been used by the Gnostics, but there is not sufficient evidence to prove that the Scrolls are themselves Gnostic Documents.

## The New Testament

There is little relationship between the Synoptic Gospels and Gnosticism, although the Gospels were used allegorically by some Gnostic groups to support their own particular ideas about Jesus. There are two passages which could be considered to have Gnostic tendencies:

- i) "No one knows the Father but the Son; no one can know the Father except through the Son." (Matthew II:25-27 and Luke IO:2I-22)
- ii) "Come all who are heavy laden and I will give you rest." (Matthew II:28-30)

The first passage stands somewhere between apocalyptic and Gnostic thought. The second contains an invitation similar to that which is to be found in Jesus Ben Sirach 5I:23-27, where the yoke is the yoke of wisdom. Both passages are probably purely Christian in origin, and even if Jesus himself did not identify with the Wisdom of God, as in the second passage, those who followed him certainly did so identify him. Also, the dating of Matthew would seem to indicate apocalyptic rather than Gnostic influence.

Paul possibly moves a little closer to Gnosticism, but always one main feature of his writing and of his faith distinguishes him from the Gnostics: whereas they believed that the Redeemer came to bring secret knowledge to a select few, Paul believed that all of mankind can be saved or delivered, not by any secret knowledge, nor by any kind of works, but "through faith" and love which are demonstrated in one's life and works<sup>II</sup>. There are

also similarities of language between Paul and the Gnostics, but when Paul speaks of evil he means "sin" from which Christ has set man free, whereas the Gnostic understanding of evil is of the material world. Totally non-Gnostic is Paul's emphasis on love as that which is most important and also his concern for "weaker brothers", although there are aspects of Paul's work which could later have been incorporated into Gnostic systems:

- a) The marked distinction between flesh and spirit.
- b) His view of the victory of Christ over the "world rulers of this darkness", <sup>I2</sup>
- c) and of Christ as the Man from Heaven <sup>I3</sup>.
- d) The usage of GNOSIS and PNEUMA.
- e) The Hellenistic language which he took from his own time and culture and used to communicate the Gospel to the Gentiles.

On the other hand, however, are those aspects of his work which are quite different from Gnostic thought:

- a) His emphasis on "love" <sup>I4</sup>,
- b) and on the Christian way of life and on what the Gospel demands of, and means for, one's way of life <sup>I5</sup>.
- c) Paul, typical of all the New Testament writers, is faithful to his biblical sources, while the Gnostics indulge in quite dramatic interpretations <sup>I6</sup>.

Paul's early writings, such as the letter to the Thessalonians, show no sign of Gnosticism but rather are apocalyptic in nature, as in I Thessalonians 4:I6-I7 where he speaks of the Lord coming down from heaven, and 2 Thessalonians I:7-8 with its reference to his

coming with angels, and Galatians 3:4 is also apocalyptic with the defeat of the planetary spirits, but this is closer to gnostic-style thought, and the emphasis is shifting from the future to what Christ has already done, as is found also in Colossians. It should be remembered, however, that this development of Paul's thought should not lightly be regarded as a gnosticising process. It is all too easy to select passages which one finds to be in agreement with any given theory and use them to support it while ignoring many others which would show it to be dubious, if not false. It, therefore, seems reasonable to suppose <sup>I7</sup> that the system of thought in Paul's writings is Pauline and may have been adopted by the Gnostics to support their theories, rather than Paul moving towards their systems.

The descriptions of God, Jesus, the Logos in John's Gospel are similar to those found in the later Gospel of Truth. However, when John's Gospel speaks of "His own" refusing to receive him, he departs completely from Gnostic thought, for the Gnostics believed that the Word, knowledge, could be received only by its "own". Also, the Gnostics could never have accepted that the "Word became flesh", since they could never have seen God as a human being or as of material existence, for God could never have any direct contact with the material world. Gnostic-style thought occurs in 3:8: no one knows where the Spirit comes from or where it goes; in 4:II : no one knows where the living water comes from; in 4:I4, 8:I4, 9:29 : no one knows where

Jesus comes from or where he goes, but even the disciples do not know <sup>18</sup>, whereas in Gnostic thought the disciples would have known for they would have been gnostics: in possession of knowledge.

John's Gospel was the favourite of the Valentinians who found in it support for some of their own systems, but the Gospel itself is not Gnostic so that here we have an example of how orthodox literature was adopted and adapted by heretical sects. The writer himself may have known nothing of the sect, yet his terminology, language, thought systems, can be said to be similar to theirs <sup>19</sup>, simply because they made use of his work, and it seems that John's was the first work to be used in this way.

Gnostic development is at least partly due to the strong Hellenistic influence which led people to misunderstand the Christian faith and Judaism, but the real origins of Gnosticism still remain vague.

### Early Gnostic Sects

The writings of Philo and of the Qumran sect are not themselves Gnostic, and the earliest evidence of Gnosticism is probably found in Colossians, the Pastorals and the Johannine writings where the false doctrine condemned appears to have been an early form of Gnosticism. Gnosticism incorporated many elements, even in its early development, among which Judaism played an important part. Wilson<sup>20</sup> identifies three main stages in the development of Gnosticism while pointing

out that the lines of demarcation are difficult to draw:

- i) "A pre-gnostic" which will include Philo and the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- ii) "A gnostic proper": this stage consists of the second century sects.
- iii) The later developments in Manichaeism, Mandaeism, and other similar movements.

Gnosticism in its earliest form, therefore, seems to manifest itself in the heresies against which the New Testament writers warn believers. Thus, it is unlikely that Paul or John were influenced by Gnostic ideas, since they would already be considered heretical. It is much more likely that the Gnostics later adopted the language and ideas originally used by Paul and John.

Gnosticism is much more complex than first impressions might indicate, for it cannot be limited to any one sect, nor even to a series of sects whose systems are almost identical. It cannot even be strictly limited to heretical groups or writings, for traces of it can be found in the most orthodox works. It is, therefore, against this background of complexity and anomaly that the writings of the Gnostics have to be considered.

## Baptismal References in the Gnostic Documents

In the following pages baptismal references are quoted from various Gnostic documents and are commented upon briefly. This should help demonstrate how the baptismal rite is employed by some of the Gnostic sects and might provide some indication of their understanding of this and related practices. It will also show how similar or dissimilar these are to the orthodox Christian practice, perhaps providing a link in the chain of its development, or perhaps not. Whatever conclusion is ultimately reached regarding this, the possibility of Gnostic influence cannot be ignored.

The quotations contained in this chapter are, unless otherwise stated, taken from Werner Foerster's book, "Gnosis", and textual notes where necessary are contained within the text of the chapter.

### Marcus

Irenaeus has been discussing the system of beliefs passed on by Marcus the Magician, who claimed to be a prophet with the ability to give others this prophetic gift. In chapter 21 of *Adversus Haereses* he provides information about the Gnostic sacraments, but this information seems to have been gathered from various sources, so that what he describes are not in fact practices peculiar to the Marcosians.

(2I.2) They affirm that it is necessary for those who have attained to perfect knowledge, that they may be regenerated into the power which is above all. Otherwise, it is impossible to enter into the Pleroma, for it is this (redemption) which leads them down into the profundities of Bythos. For the baptism of (ie. instituted by) the visible Jesus took place for the remission of sins, but the redemption by the Christ who descended upon him for perfection. They allege that the former is psychic and the latter spiritual. The baptism is regarded as having been proclaimed by John unto repentance (Mk.I:4), but the redemption by the Christ who is in him (Jesus) was brought in with a view to perfection. And it is to this that he refers when he says, 'And I have another baptism to be baptised with, and I am strongly urged towards it' (Lke.I2:50). But the Lord is said to have added this redemption to the sons of Zebedee, when their mother asked that they might sit on the right hand and on the left in his kingdom, saying 'Can you be baptised with the baptism with which I am to be baptised?' (Mtt.20:20ff.). And they say Paul often clearly set forth the 'redemption' in Christ Jesus and that it is this that is handed down by them in various and discordant ways.

(4) But some say that it is superfluous to bring people to the water, but they mix oil and water together and pour it on the heads of those to be initiated, with expressions like those which we have just mentioned: this is regarded as being the redemption. They also anoint with balsam. But others reject all this and say that one ought not to celebrate the mystery of this ineffable and invisible power by means of visible and corruptible created things, the inconceivable and incorporeal by means of what is sensually tangible and corporeal. The perfect redemption is said to be the knowledge of the ineffable "Greatness". From ignorance both deficiency and passion derived: through 'knowledge' will the entire substance derived from ignorance be destroyed. Therefore, this 'knowledge' is redemption of the inner man. And this is not corporeal, since the body perishes, nor psychic, because the soul also derives from the deficiency and is like a habitation of the spirit (pneuma): the redemption must therefore be spiritual. The inner spiritual man is redeemed through knowledge: sufficient for them is the knowledge of all things and this is the true redemption.

(5) Still others there are who redeem the dying up to the point of their departure by pouring on their heads oil and water, or the aforementioned ointment with water, together with the above named invocations, in order that they may become unassailable by and invisible to the powers and authorities, and that their inner man may ascend above the realms of the invisible whilst their body remains behind in the created world, and their soul is delivered to the Demiurge. (Adv. Haer. I 2I.2,4,5. Foerster I. 2I8-2I)



They affirm that it is necessary..... that they may be regenerated into the power which is above all. Otherwise it is impossible to enter the Pleroma.  
(2I.2)

The idea of re-birth is found again in Adversus Haereses I 23.5 when Irenaeus speaks of Menander and his followers:

His (Menander's) disciples received resurrection through baptism into him. (Foerster I. 33)

The concept of resurrection is clearly connected with baptism in this system of thought, more closely, it appears than in the thinking of the Marcosians, who, according to Irenaeus, have a less unified approach to achieving this. This immediately demonstrates how futile it is to try to construct a single Gnostic baptismal practice or a simple definition of what such a rite meant for them.

Taking the statement about Menander's disciples it is possible to state that resurrection and baptism are linked. One can then try to elaborate a little on this basic conclusion. Death is not mentioned in connection with the statement about his followers and their baptism. If, however, it is implied by "resurrection", it may contain an understanding of baptism similar to the Christian one: dying and rising. Dying to the old life and rising to the new life in Christ, or in this case, Menander. The phrase "into him" is used also in Christian baptism. In this case it seems to suggest that the baptised person gains the same attributes or power as Menander who already possessed (so he claimed) eternal life and possibly also the "magic knowledge" which enabled him to conquer the "angels who created the world". For Christians, baptism "into Jesus" or "into his name"

would have been acceptance of the task which he (Jesus) passed on to his followers. Baptism for the followers of Menander may have demanded a similar commitment but this is not clear. Disciples of both Jesus and Menander believed that they would receive some form of benefit from baptism. For the follower of Menander it was that he would never grow old and die; for the Christian it is not always so clear. Baptism certainly bestowed benefit: that of becoming a member of the Christian community, and with the development of the rite and the inclusion of an epiklesis it also brought the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. There are, therefore, certain similarities, the most convincing being the practice of a baptismal rite by both, the other comparisons being far less conclusive.

The Marcosians, or some of them at least, regard baptism as necessary in order to enter the heavenly spheres, but whether this could be likened to the Christian "heaven" or "eternal life" is difficult to say, but the concept of "redemption" certainly appears similar and this is perhaps more important for it is a direct effect of baptism while the "Pleroma" is an independent concept even though entry to it is dependent upon baptism.

Baptism, however is not the only qualification for entry: baptism itself is open only to those who have fulfilled a prior requirement,

"Those who have attained to perfect knowledge".

Baptism is thus linked with the gaining of knowledge.

The gaining of knowledge and understanding forms part, and an important part, of the preparation for Christian

baptism. The Marcosian reference could be to a mystical process or to a "catechumenate" of some description. If it is mystical, the word "attained" suggests that it was not a sudden enlightenment but rather something which has been accumulated over a period of time: a period of preparation as in the Christian practice, although the "preparation" would probably have been quite different from that of the Christian catechumenate.

For the baptism of (that is, instituted by) the visible Jesus took place for the remission of sins, but the redemption by the Christ who descended upon him for perfection. (2I.2)

This comment is an example of the Gnostic anxiety to separate material and spiritual things. It is not possible, from the information provided, to establish whether a baptism for the remission of sins is practised in addition to the rite which achieves "the redemption" or whether the rite for "the redemption" is sufficient in itself. Two descriptions of "the redemption" rite are contained in 2I.3. The first is such that it could be practised in addition to a baptism for remission of sins, and the second is more likely to have been practised independently, for it falls into two distinct sections which could take into account any sense of progression which was considered necessary, and the first part of it contains elements similar to those of a baptismal practice which would achieve remission of sins: so similar that the first part of this act would merely be a repetition of any prior one, and since this is clearly a very important rite it is unlikely that elements of an inferior rite would be

repeated as a major part of this.

The first description is vague and does not appear to relate to a baptismal rite although its effect is the same:

3. Some of them prepare a bridal chamber and perform a mystic rite, with certain invocations, for those who are being consecrated, and they claim that what they are effecting is a spiritual marriage, after the image of the conjunctions (syzygies) above.

The basic shape of the second rite described is not unlike that practised within orthodox Christianity:

Others bring to the water and baptize saying, 'In (to) the name of the unknown Father of all things, into Truth, the mother of all, into him who descended on Jesus, into union, into redemption, into the communion of the powers.'.....

This is what those who are initiating say; but the initiate answers, 'I am established, I am redeemed, and I redeem my soul from this age and from all that comes from it, in the name of Iao, who redeemed his soul unto the redemption in Christ, the living one.' Then the bystanders add. 'Peace be with all on whom this name rests.' Then they anoint the initiate with oil from the balsam tree. This oil is said to be a type of the sweet savour which is above all terrestrial things. (2I.3)

A further description follows:

4. But some say it is superfluous to bring people to the water, but they mix oil and water together and pour it on the heads of those to be initiated, with expressions like those which we have just mentioned: this is regarded as being the redemption. They also anoint with balsam.

This is a rite similar to the one just described, but with an important difference: mixture of oil and water is poured on the head of the candidate instead of immersion or submersion in the water. The accepted method of baptism in the Church was, originally, immersion or submersion in water, with the acceptance of other methods only when the health of the candidate rendered

the accepted method dangerous, this practice being known as "clinical baptism". General acceptance of sprinkling or pouring was to come only considerably later. It is, therefore, interesting to note that some Gnostics advocated this method while immersion was still the practice demanded within orthodox Christianity.

But others reject all this and say that one ought not to celebrate the mystery of this ineffable and invisible power by means of visible and corruptible things, the inconceivable and incorporeal by means of what is sensually tangible." (2I.4)

This attitude is one which is alien to the early Church but not to other forms of Gnosticism such as those practised by the Archontics and the Manichaeans.

The Manichaeans will be dealt with more fully at a later stage and Epiphanius has this to say of the Archontics:

6. They condemn baptism, even though some of them were previously baptized; and they reject participation in the sacraments and (deny) their value, as extraneous and introduced in the name of Sabaoth; for like some of the other heresies they think that it is he who is the dominant power in the seventh heaven and overpowers the others. 7. And they say that the soul is food for the authorities and powers, without which they cannot live, since it derives from the dew which comes from above and gives them strength. 8. And when it acquires knowledge (gnosis) and shuns the baptism of the Church and the name of Sabaoth who has given men the Law, it ascends from heaven to heaven and speaks its defence before each power and so attains to the higher (power), the Mother and (to the ?) Father of all, from whom it has come down into this world.

(Epiphanius, Panarion XL 2, 6-8. Foerster I 297)

Here the Gnostic rejection of anything material is extended also to the sacraments, which are regarded as unnecessary.

5. Still others there are who redeem the dying up to the point of their departure by pouring on their heads oil and water.

This practice emphasises the essential and eternal importance of receiving "the redemption" and is found also in the Mandaeen attitude to the baptism of infants. For the Church this would constitute "clinical baptism" which is permitted by the Didache. In the time of Constantine, however, it had become a malpractice within the Church to delay baptism until the point of death, so that the candidate could be reasonably certain that he would not commit further sins between receiving baptism and the moment of his death, since sins committed after baptism were believed unpardonable. If Irenaeus had managed to provide more information about this practice it might have been possible to compare it with the modern Roman Catholic Church's sacrament of "Extreme Unction".

Baruch

In his work "The Refutation of All Heresies", Hippolytus provides a summary and criticism of the Book of Baruch, said to have been written by a man named Justin. As do other Gnostic works, it regards this world as evil and escape from it is, therefore, essential so that one can enter the realm of light. From his comments it is quite clear that Hippolytus finds this work totally repugnant.

27. I. There is written also in the first book entitled Baruch an oath which they make those swear who are about to hear these mysteries and be perfected with the 'Good'. This oath, he says, our father Elohim swore, and did not repent of having sworn it; of whom

it is written, he says, 'The Lord has sworn, and will not repent' (Ps. II0/I09:4). 2. And the oath is this: 'I swear by him who is above all things, 'the Good' to preserve these mysteries and to declare them to no one, neither to turn back from the Good to creation'. When he swears this oath, he goes into 'the Good' and sees 'what eye has not seen and ear has not heard and has not entered into the heart of man' (I Cor.2:9), and drinks from the living water, which is for them a (baptismal) bath, as they think, a well of living water springing up. 3. For there is distinction, he says, between water and water, and the water below the firmament is of the evil creation, in which choic (material) and psychic men wash themselves, and there is above the firmament the living water of 'the Good', in which the pneumatic, living men bathe, in which Elohim bathed and did not repent of such a baptism.

(Ref. V 27. I-4. Foerster I. 57/8)

"An oath which they make them swear".

In the Christian rite a profession of faith was always considered necessary before receiving baptism, and this Gnostic oath promises two things, both of which are also important elements of the Christian practice:

a) "To preserve the mysteries and declare them to no one". Although there is no evidence of a "disciplina arcani" at the time of Hippolytus this was to become an established feature of the rite as it developed in most areas of the Church.

b) "Neither to turn back from the Good to creation."

A similar promise is made by the Christian candidate immediately before baptism is administered, in the form of the renunciation, when the devil and everything associated with him is rejected and the candidate turns and declares his allegiance to Christ.

"When he swears this oath, he goes into 'the Good' and sees 'what eye has not seen and ear has not heard and has not entered into the heart of man' (I Cor. 2:9)."

The meaning of this statement is not clear but it comes

close to the descriptions of initiations into the mystery religions. These descriptions are, admittedly, very limited, but the initiation of Lucius into the cult of Isis could be summed up in words such as these.

"And drinks from the living water, which is for them a (baptismal) bath, as they think, a well of living water springing up."

That the water is living would fulfill the instructions of the Didache concerning the kind of water required for baptism. The drinking of the water, however, rather than immersion in it or sprinkling with it, was never to become the practice of the Christian Church. Perhaps the nearest rite to this is the Mandaean, whereby a threefold drink of the "living water" is given to those who have received baptism (by immersion), but this does not replace going down into the water. Another similarity to the Mandaean rite is the concept of water:

"The water below....., and there is above the firmament the living water of 'the Good'."

The Mandaeans believe that the baptismal streams (the jordans) are related to the heavenly Jordan, and when someone is immersed into water the heavenly or spiritual element of it is experienced. This also is evident in the belief that if a child dies before baptism it cannot enter the world of light until the end of the world when it will be baptised in the heavenly Euphrates.

".....Chosen as his own possession by the living water, the Euphrates who flows through the midst of Babylon." (Ref. V 9.2I. Foerster I. 282)

Hippolytus is speaking in this section of his work not about the Mandaeans but about the Naassenes.



There may be no connection whatsoever, but it is interesting to note that for the Mandaeans, at the end of the world, it is the heavenly Euphrates in which the unbaptised will receive baptism. For the Naassenes, the living water which sets aside men as "spiritual men" possessed by Christ, is described as the Euphrates. Baruch does not give a name to the living water which is to be found "above the firmament" but the basic principle appears to be very similar.

Immediately following the quotation regarding the Naassenes is a phrase worth noting:

".....The only true Christians, who complete the mystery at the third gate are then anointed with an unutterable ointment."

The implication is that baptism is completed by this act of anointing and that without it, therefore, the baptismal rite would be incomplete, which would coincide with the beliefs of later Christians of the mainstream Church who believed that baptism was incomplete without some kind of post-baptismal rite, or confirmation.

#### The Valentinians

Clement of Alexandria's *Excerpta Ex Theodoto* is a collection of sayings from various Valentinians, of whom Theodotus is only one although the entire collection bears his name.

22.I. And when the apostle says, 'What are they doing who are baptized for the dead?' (I Cor. 15:29), what he is actually saying is that for us the angels of whom we are part were baptized. 2. We are the dead, who

have been put to death through this condition. The living are the males who did not share in this condition. 3. 'If the dead are not raised, why, then, are people baptized? (I Cor. 15:29) So then we are raised equal to the angels, restored to the males, member to member to form a unity. 4. 'Those who are baptized for the dead' (I Cor. 15:29), they say, are the angels who are baptized for us, in order that we too, possessing the name, may not be held back and prevented by Horos (Limit) and the Cross from entering into the Pleroma.

5. Hence also at the laying on of hands they say at the end, 'for the angelic redemption', that is, the one which the angels also have, in order that he who has received the redemption may be baptized in the same name as that in which his angel was baptized before him. 6. In the beginning the angels were baptized through the 'redemption' of the name which came down upon Jesus in the dove and redeemed him. 7. Redemption was necessary even for Jesus in order that he might not be detained by the Ennoia of the deficiency in which he was placed, though conducted (thereto) through Sophia, as Theodotus says. (Exc. Ex Theod. 22. Foerster I. 224/5)

"So then we are raised equal to the angels, restored to the males, member to member to form a unity." (22.3)

This is an interesting interpretation of Paul's reference to those who "are baptized for the dead" (I Cor. 15:29), but it is not one which the Church has been inclined to adopt. The Valentinians seem to have believed that their own baptism was not sufficient to restore them to true life and cure their spiritual impotence, but the baptism of the angels on their behalf achieved all this, or at least made it possible for them to achieve this through their own earthly baptism:

"Hence also at the laying of hands they say at the end, 'for the angelic redemption', that is, the one which the angels also have, in order that he who has received the redemption may be baptized in the same name as that in which his angel was baptized before him." (22.5)

Baptism thus becomes a representation of what has already happened in the angelic realms on behalf of the candidate.

A statement to be found in a later section of this work might have been less objectionable to the Church, advocating the necessity of baptism and understanding:

It is not the bath alone that makes us free, but also the knowledge: who were we ? what have we become ? where were we ? into what place have we been cast? whether are we hastening ? from what are we delivered ? what is birth ? what is rebirth ? (78.2)

While the Church might not have pursued exactly that kind of knowledge during the catechumenate period, the second century Church, except in extreme circumstances, would have insisted that the baptismal candidate possessed knowledge about the Faith and to this end were instructed and scrutinised before baptism.

The Acts of Thomas

#### Textual Note

The texts quoted here are, as already stated, from the translations in Werner Foerster's book, Gnosis, which are based on the Greek version of the texts. Although the Acts of Thomas were written in Syriac, the Greek version dates beyond that of the presently available Syriac texts <sup>21</sup>. In the descriptions of baptismal rites, however, the Greek and Syriac versions do vary, as set out, very briefly, below <sup>22</sup>.

The descriptions of baptism in chapters I21, I32 and I57 are the same in both Greek and Syriac, which suggests that the original text is contained within these chapters.

In chapter 49 the versions differ. According to A.F.J. Klijn<sup>23</sup>, the Syriac appears to be secondary and the Greek version seems to be incomplete in its description of the baptismal rite.

In chapter 25 the Syriac version corresponds with the descriptions given in I2I, I32 and I57, while the Greek version reverses the procedure. The Syriac, therefore, appears to be the original.

In chapter 27 the Syriac again agrees with I2I, I32 and I57 as well as with the Syriac 25. The Greek version is more complicated and this complexity<sup>24</sup> could indicate that this is a later development of the original text, and is, perhaps, trying to give a more Western slant to the rite.

The following pages will contain several quotations from the Acts of Thomas. These are taken from Foerster's translation from the Greek texts except chapter 25 (Act Two) which is Klijn's translation from the Syriac, since Foerster does not provide this translation within his book; and chapters 26/7 (Act Two) and 49 (Act Five) are reproduced in translation from both versions.

The Acts of Thomas is a work typical of all Gnostic acts of the apostles. It is named after Judas Thomas the Twin. John's Gospel gives him the title "Twin" and this has been taken to be a reference to a twin of Jesus. He was known from Egypt to Syria and to India, where he was supposed to have been the first

apostle to bring Christianity. According to the Acts, it is decided by lot the areas to which the disciples will go and Thomas draws India, but refuses to go. However, he is sold to Abbanes a merchant of King Gundafor (1st. century AD.) and so arrives in India.

The accounts of Thomas' activities in India are a combination of legend and myth, and gained a considerable amount of popularity throughout the Church. It was probably written in the first half of the third century, but contains traditions which come from a much earlier period. Most historians believe that the document originated in Syria, and the original language of the Acts, as already noted, was Syriac.

The work makes a number of significant references to baptismal rites (and other uses of water). In the second Act, Thomas is recorded as having arrived in India where he meets King Gundaphor. Eventually the King and his brother Gad (who has returned from the dead to tell Gundaphor what he saw in heaven) ask for baptism:

25. Judas saith: "I praise Thee, our Lord Jesus the Messiah, who art alone the God of truth, and there is no other, and thou knowest whatever man does not know. Thou whose mercy is upon man, whom Thou hast willed and made, - and they have forgotten Thee, but Thou hast not neglected them - do Thou receive the king and his brother, and unite them to Thy fold, and anoint them, and purify them from their uncleanness, and guard them from the wolves, and feed them in Thy meadows, and let them drink of Thy fountain, which is never turbid and the stream thereof never faileth; for, lo, they beg of thee and supplicate, and wish to become servants of Thine, and to be persecuted by Thy enemy, and to be hated for Thy sake. Let them therefore have boldness in Thee, and be confirmed by Thy glorious mysteries, and receive of the gifts

of Thy gifts".

26. And they were rejoicing with holy hymns, and were cleaving unto the Apostle and not parting from him; and every one who was needy, was receiving and being relieved. And they begged of him that they might receive the sign, and said to him: "Our souls are turned to God to receive the sign for we have heard that all the sheep of that God, whom thou preachest are known to Him by the sign". Judas saith to them: "I too rejoice, and ask of you to partake of the Eucharist and the blessing of this Messiah whom I preach". And the king gave order that the bath should be closed for seven days and that no man should bathe in it. And when the seven days were done, on the eighth day they three entered into the bath by night that Judas might baptise them. And many lamps were lighted in the bath.

27. And when they had entered into the bath-house, Judas went in before them. And our Lord appeared unto them: "Peace be with you, my brethren". And they heard the voice only, but the form they did not see, while it was, for till now they had not been baptised. And Judas went up and stood upon the edge of the cistern, and poured oil upon their heads, and said. "Come, holy name of the Messiah; come, power of grace, which art from on high; come, revealer of the hidden mysteries; come, mother of the seven houses, whose rest was in the eighth house; come, messenger of reconciliation; and communicate with the minds of these youths; come, Spirit of holiness, and purify their reins and hearts". And he baptised them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit of holiness. And when they had come up out of the water, a youth appeared to them, and he was holding a lighted taper; and the light of the lamps became pale through its light. And when they had gone forth, he became invisible to them; and the Apostle said: "We were not even able to bear Thy light, because it is too great for our vision". And when it dawned and was morning, he broke the Eucharist and let them partake of the table of the Messiah and they were glad and rejoicing. And when many were added and were coming to the refuge of the Messiah, Judas did not cease to preach and say to them.....

(Acts of Thomas 2. 25-27. Klijn p. 76-78)

26. ....They (king Gundafor and his brother Gad) entreated him that they themselves might at last receive the seal of the Word (?), and they said to him: 'Since our souls are at ease and we are earnest about God, give us the seal. For we have heard you say that the God whom you proclaim recognises his own sheep by his seal'. The apostle said to them: 'I am glad and I entreat you to receive the seal and partake with me in this eucharist and praising

of the Lord and Christ whom I proclaim; he is himself the Father of truth in whom I have taught you to believe'. And he ordered them to bring to (him) oil, so that through the oil they might receive the seal. So they brought the oil and lit many lamps; for it was night.

27. And the apostle stood up and sealed them. And the Lord was revealed to them through a voice, and said, 'Peace be with you (Jn.20:19, etc.), brothers'. But they heard only a voice, and did not see his form. For they had not yet received the sealing with the seal. And the apostle took the oil and smeared (it) on their head, anointed and smeared them, and began to say: 'Come, holy name of Christ..... and seal them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'..... But when daylight came, he broke bread and made them participants in the eucharist of Christ.

(Acts of Thomas 2. 26-27. Foerster I. 358,359)

Chapter 25 provides the background to the administration of this particular baptism. Chapter 26 in the Syriac version is a further lead-in to the rite, whereas the Greek places great emphasis on the preparation of the oil for use in the baptism. In chapter 27 the baptismal order is different in each version (as was the order in the Syrian and Western Church). Whatever the textual variations, however, these passages are interesting for a number of reasons:

- a) the rite described here probably reflects quite an early tradition, yet it is already a developed rite.
- b) The term "to seal" (found only in the Greek text) became commonly used in the orthodox Church, although it is sometimes used of the anointing rather than of the baptismal rite as a whole. If this is the application here then the Greek and Syriac versions would not be so very different, that is, if the first "seal" is, in fact, a reference to water baptism<sup>24</sup>, and not to a

first anointing, but this is not immediately clear: in chapters I20 and I3I the term "seal" is applied to the whole baptismal rite. In chapter 27, therefore, the "seal" could be the anointing and the baptism with water. The term may originally have been applied to the anointing only.

In the Greek version of chapter 27 there is an anointing at the very beginning of the rite which would explain why the term "sealing with the seal" has to be employed to cover a second anointing which so closely follows the first, and which is not a practice common to the rest of the Acts, probably being a later development. Also, the Syriac version says, "He baptised them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", as in other passages which describe water baptism. The Greek, on the other hand, places these words within the epiklesis on the oil used for the "sealing with the seal". Klijn <sup>25</sup> expresses the opinion that the Greek seems to have left out the water baptism deliberately, and this view is supported by the order found in the Greek 25 where anointing follows water baptism, making the anointing rather than baptism with water the ultimate part of the rite. This means that in chapter 27, water baptism is implicit rather than explicit, so that the first "seal" probably referred to the rite as a whole (including water baptism). This being the case, "sealing with the seal" would refer to a second anointing with oil: a post-baptismal anointing. If this is so, the two rites are different in that the



Syriac has baptism with water as the ultimate act, while the Greek rite is completed by a further anointing. The difference lying not just in the existence of a second "seal" in the Greek version, but in the positioning of this act at the very end of the baptismal rite and the change of emphasis implied by this position.

c) "Baptism" is thus shown no longer to be only a water rite, but a combination of baptism in water and anointing with oil.

d) The oil is only poured over the head of the candidate and is not applied to the whole body as in later orthodox practices (and this is especially evident in the Syriac text). It is, therefore, an example of a rite which lies between the primitive and the highly ritualised, such as that used at Antioch and recorded by John Chrysostom (4th. century). The Milanese rite of the same period anoints only the head and pours water over the candidate as in the Acts of Thomas. That rite is, however, developed far beyond the one described here.

e) In the light of later questions about baptism and confirmation, it is interesting to note that here the water rite and the anointing seem to be regarded almost as separate acts. In the Greek version, at least, the second anointing is given considerable prominence as already noted.

f) The use of "the name" is common, in some form or other, to all baptismal practices. Its use here again underlines the importance attached to the name: of Christ,

and of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Both usages are employed in this prayer of Thomas.

g) However, the baptism was given by Thomas without regard of time or place. The time preferred for baptism when Hippolytus recorded his account of the baptismal practice was the Paschal season, and it was administered in a font or cistern specially constructed for the purpose. In this respect, therefore, Thomas is closer to the tradition of the canonical Acts of the Apostles than to Hippolytus' account.

In Act five, Thomas meets a "very lovely woman" who tells him that the devil has been tormenting her for five years (ch. 42). She asks Thomas to exorcise the demon (ch. 43), which he does (ch. 44). There follows the administration of baptism and a Eucharist:

49. ....And the woman begged of him and saith to him: "Apostle of the Most High, give me the seal of my Lord, that the enemy may not again come back upon me". And he went to a river which was close by there, and baptised her in the name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit of holiness; and many were baptised with her. And the Apostle ordered his deacon to make ready the Eucharist.....

(Act 5. 49. Klijn p. 90)

49.....And the woman also entreated him and said, 'Apostle of the Highest, give me the seal, so that yon enemy may not again return to me'. Then he made her step near him, laid his hands upon her and sealed her in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Many others also were sealed with her. And the apostle ordered his servant to place a table nearby.....

(Act 5. 49. Foerster I. 362)

Here, again, the term "seal" occurs. In the Syriac text the request for the "seal" is immediately followed by baptism in water, whereas, in the Greek text there is no mention of water baptism: Thomas lays his hands on the woman to "seal" her. Whether water baptism is implicit in the Greek text, or whether it has no place whatsoever in this particular episode, is not at all clear.

The events which preceded this sealing may have been precursors of the practice of exorcising candidates before their baptism, but that could be the case only if a baptism was in fact administered in chapter 49.

Act six refers to an incident which is not directly related to baptism but which is, nevertheless, of interest. A young man who had committed a sinful act comes and takes the eucharist as a result of which his two hands wither:

52. And the Apostle commanded water to be brought to him in a bowl. And when the water had been brought he said: 'Come water from the living water, that which is from that which is, which also has been sent to us; rest which has been sent to us from the rest; power of salvation which conquers all things and is subject to its own will; come and dwell in these waters, so that the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit may perfectly be perfected in them'. And he said to the youth, 'Go wash your hands in these waters'. And when he had washed them they were restored, and the Apostle said to him, 'Do you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, that he can do all things?' And he said, 'Though I am very unimportant, I believe. But I did this thing thinking to do something good. For I did ask her as I told you, but she would not listen to me, to keep herself chaste'.

(Act 6. 52. Foerster I. 363)

This passage shows the almost magical importance

which was attached to the eucharistic elements, something of which was to become part of the orthodox tradition. It also shows the power attributed to consecrated water: the water, once blessed by Thomas, had the power to heal as well as cleanse from sin. A similar power appears to be attributed to the water of baptism in the account of the baptism of Mygdonia. Oil as well as water is employed in the rite, and it is followed by a eucharist:

I2I. And when Narkia had brought (them) Mygdonia uncovered her head, and was standing before the holy Apostle. And he took the oil, and cast (it) on her head, and said: "Holy oil, which wast given to us for unction, and hidden mystery of the Cross, which is seen through it - Thou, the straightener of crooked limbs, Thou our Lord Jesus, life and health and remission of sins, - let Thy power come and abide upon this oil, and let Thy holiness dwell in it". And he cast (it) upon the head of Mygdonia and said: "Heal her of her old wounds, and wash away from her her sores, and strengthen her weakness". And when he had cast the oil on her head, he told her nurse to anoint her, and to put a cloth round her loins; and he fetched the basin of their conduit. And Judas went up (and) stood over it, and baptised Mygdonia in the name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit of holiness. And when she had come out and put on her clothes, he fetched and brake the Eucharist and (filled) the cup, and let Mygdonia partake of the table of the Messiah and of the cup of the Son of God. And he said to her: "Now then thou hast received the sign, and gained thyself thy life for ever and ever". And a voice was heard from heaven which said: "Yea, Amen and Amen".

(Act IO. I2I. Klijn p. I30)

(In the Greek text the prayer is shorter, but the order of the rite is the same. Since the Syriac does give the longer version of the prayer this is the version I have reproduced here.)

A major difference between the Greek and Syriac versions of this chapter is that instead of baptism taking

place in the "basin of their conduit", the Greek text describes it as being administered in a "water-spring" <sup>26</sup>: in living water, which would be in accord with the instructions of the Didache and similar to the descriptions of baptism found in the Acts of the Apostles.

Another difference is that the Syriac has the epiklesis spoken over the oil, whereas in the Greek it is upon the person, that is, Mygdonia. These differences, however, do not alter the order of the rite itself, which, as already noted, is the same in both versions.

In chapter II8 Mygdonia tries to see Judas in prison and in order to do this has to pass the keepers of the prison, whom Klijn identifies with the guardians between heaven and earth <sup>27</sup>. When she sees Judas she thinks he is one of the rulers and is afraid because she has not yet received the seal. This suggests that she is seeking baptism, partly anyway, for the protection it will provide. This reason for seeking baptism is not unlike the reason given in chapter 25 prior to the baptism of Gundaphor and Gad: to "guard them from the wolves". It is also found in chapter 49 where the woman asks for baptism so that the enemy may not return.

Another significant aspect of baptism is its power to forgive sins. In chapters 25, 48, I2I, I32, I57, this is achieved by both the baptism in water and the anointing. It is thus, really, the "seal", the entire

rite which achieves this, and not water baptism alone. This is in keeping with the Syriac liturgy which attributes a subordinate role to water baptism<sup>28</sup>. Baptism also bestows freedom, or courage, as in chapters 25, 26, I20, I2I<sup>29</sup>. In addition to these gifts, "One gets an insight in the mysterious things (c. I7), one becomes a dwelling place of Christ (c. I56), the soul is mingled with the Spirit (c. I2I gr.), man is renewed or born again (c. I3I)".<sup>30</sup> According to the descriptions of baptism contained within the Acts of Thomas, therefore, no one particular gift or state is bestowed by baptism, but many.

The descriptions of the baptismal rite and what it achieves are generally in keeping with the rite practised by the Syrian Church,<sup>31</sup> while the descriptions in the Greek text tend to follow the pattern of the Western practice.

#### The Hypostasis of the Archons

This work consists of two parts, possibly of two writings which have been combined. It is contained in Codex II of Nag Hammadi (86, 20 - 97, 23). The first part consists of a question asked by an unidentified person about the hypostasis of the powers, and of the answer, provided by an unidentified person. It culminates in the birth of Norea, a daughter of Eve. In the second section, Norea asks the question of ELELETH, "the great angel, one of the four luminaries

which stand before the great invisible spirit"

(93, I8-22), who has been sent by the Holy Spirit to speak with Norea and deliver her from the archons. He answers her question in this second section.

96, 35. (The spirit of) truth which the Father has sent (to them), that no one will teach them about everything (cf. Jn. I4:I6f., 26). And he will anoint them with the anointing of eternal life which was given to him from the generation which has no king. 5 Then they will cast away from them blind thought, and they will trample under foot the death of the powers. And they will go up to the infinite light where this seed is.

(Hypostasis of the Archons 96, 35 - 97, IO.

Foerster II. 5I, 52)

"And he will anoint them with the anointing of eternal life which was given to him....."

There is, again, strong emphasis on the great power attributed to the anointing, which here seems to take over the function of baptism. It bestows eternal life; it seems to bring enlightenment in that those who receive it "will cast away from them blind thought" and "will go up to the infinite light.."; and it also provides protection, allowing them to "trample under foot the death of the powers". Like the baptismal rite in the Acts of Thomas, which also stressed the importance of the anointing, the anointing alone in The Hypostasis of the Archons brings many gifts.

Additional References to "Baptism"

These will not be dealt with in any detail and are presented here only to show the range of references to baptism in some form which occur in the Gnostic

writings, or thought.

#### Basilides

The (disciples) of Basilides observe also the day of his (Jesus') baptism in that they spend the preceding night in (scripture) readings.

(Fragm. 3. Clem.Alex., Strom. I 2I = §I46, I-4  
Foerster I. 76)

This is a passing reference to baptism and the remainder of the passage is concerned with the dating of Jesus' baptism and passion.

#### The Ophites

I2. .... When the Sophia who is below knew that her brother was coming down to her, she both announced his coming through John, and prepared a baptism of repentance (Matt. 3: I-I2 par.), and prepared in advance Jesus, so that when he came down Christ would find a clean vessel, and so that through her son Ialdabaoth a woman might receive annunciation from Christ.

I4. They base their statements about the descent and ascent of Christ on the fact that the disciples report no great deed done by Jesus either before the baptism or after the resurrection.

(Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. I 30,I2 and I4. Foerster I. 92, 93)

In the first passage Sophia prepares a baptism of repentance to enable the Christ to enter Jesus. This baptism is for cleansing. The passage as a whole demonstrates the Gnostic problem of coping with the coming of God into the material world which they regarded as evil, or at least worthless: the Christ is separated from the earthly Jesus who requires the cleansing of baptism before the Christ can enter him. The second passage follows the same line of thought



although the reference to baptism is made only in the passing.

#### Heracleon

Heracleon regards the word of the Pharisees relating to the fact that baptizing is the duty of Christ, Elijah, and of every prophet, as having been spoken quite reasonably, and he speaks in these words: 'On them alone is there an obligation to baptize'... But, not unwisely, he goes on to say: 'The Pharisees asked the question out of malice and not out of a desire to learn.'

(Fragment 6, on John I:25; Origen, in Joh. VI 23  
Foerster I. I64)

Heracleon believes that the Pharisees were correct to say that baptizing is the duty of Christ, Elijah, and of every prophet, even though their questioning was done, not out of interest but out of malice.

#### Marcus

6. The fruit of this calculation and arrangement is said by him to have appeared in the likeness of an image, namely him who after six days ascended into the mountain with three others, and became the sixth (Matt. 17:Iff. par.), who descended and was contained in the Hebdomad, who himself was an illustrious Ogdoad and contained in himself the entire number of the elements, who, on the occasion of his baptism, was revealed by the descent of the dove (Matt. 3:I6 par.) - which is Alpha and Omega, for its number is 801.

(Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. I4:6. Foerster I. 206)

This passage contains only a very brief reference to baptism whose importance seems to lie in its contribution to the mathematical calculations being undertaken here.

(Foerster points out that "Hebdomad" is a symbol of our present world.)

3. ....And when he came to the water (of baptism) there descended upon him in the form of a dove the one who ascended on high and who completed the number twelve.

(Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. I5:3. Foerster I.210)

Here again, baptism seems to be mentioned for its significance in the completion of numbers.

#### The Valentinians

2. But since we were divided, Jesus was baptized, that the undivided might be divided, until he unites us with them in the Pleroma, in order that we, the many become one, may all of us be united with the One which for our sakes was divided.

(Exc. ex Theod. I, 36, 2. Foerster I. 228)

The baptism of Jesus effects union, in the Pleroma, with angels who have already been baptised for us.

78, I. Until baptism, they say, Fate is effective, but after it the astrologers no longer speak the truth.  
2. It is not the bath (washing) alone which makes us free, but also the knowledge.....

(Exc. ex Theod. I, 78:I, 2. Foerster I. 230)

In the Acts of Thomas, baptism with water combined with anointing provided protection against wolves, the enemy, and so on. In this passage baptism combined with knowledge appears to give protection against Fate.

#### The Naassenes

I9. ....For the promise of the washing (in baptism) is, they say, nothing less than the introduction into unfading enjoyment of him who in their fashion is washed in living water and anointed with unutterable anointing.

(Hippolytus, Ref., V 7, I9. Foerster I. 267)

"Living water" is specified for the administration of baptism, but this, in itself, is not sufficient for it is combined with anointing. The ordering of the rite would, therefore, appear to take the form of a baptism in water followed by an anointing.

#### The Sethians and Archontics

6. They condemn baptism, even though some of them were previously baptized; and they reject participation in the sacraments and (deny) their value, as extraneous and introduced in the name of Sabaoth.....

8. And when it acquires knowledge (gnosis) and shuns the baptism of the Church and the name of Sabaoth who has given men the Law, it ascends from heaven to heaven and speaks its defence before each power and so attains to the higher (power), the Mother and (to the ?) Father of all, from whom it has come down into this world.....

(Epiphanius, Panarion XL 2, 6 and 8. Foerster I. 297)

This is an example of Gnostic rejection of the sacraments: the soul requires knowledge, not baptism, to ascend through the heavens.

#### The Apocalypse of Adam

Then a voice came to them, (5) saying: 'Michev, Michar, and Mnesinus, you who are over the holy baptism and the living water, why do you cry to the (10) living God with lawless voices and tongues to which no law is given and souls that are full of blood and filthy (deeds) ? ..... You have defiled the water of life, and drawn it within (20) the will of the powers, into whose hands you are given to serve them.

(The Apocalypse of Adam 84. 5-20. Foerster II. 23)

Baptism itself is not rejected here, but criticism is made of the way it is being practised: they are not, it appears, sufficiently aware of the spiritual

importance of the rite.

### The Exegesis on the Soul

But the cleansing (35) of the soul is to receive its (newness), (I32, I) its former physical condition, and it turns again, which is its baptism.....  
For the beginning of salvation is repentance. That is why John came before the coming (Parousia) of Christ, preaching the baptism of repentance (Mark I:4 par.).(25)  
Now the baptism of repentance takes place in sorrow and grief of heart.

(The Exegesis on the Soul I3I, 35- I32, I and I35, 24 and 25. Foerster II. I06 and I08)

The baptism described here is for cleansing so that the soul can return to its original condition: the male and the female parts can again be united when the soul has been purified. This cleansing and purification is necessary before the Christ can descend upon the earthly Jesus and this is the reason that John came proclaiming the baptism of repentance.

The baptismal references to be found in the Gospel of Philip will be considered in the next chapter, as will the references to anointing.

### Additional References to "Anointing"

#### Barbelo

Barbelo (in some cases the same being as Ennoia, in some cases different) gives birth to a spark of light which through anointing becomes Christ. (Apocryphon of John, BG, ie. short version now in Berlin, 29.I8 - 3I. 5)

The (10) invisible spirit rejoiced over the light which had come into being, which was first manifested in the first power - which is Pronoia, Barbelo. And he anointed (15) it with his goodness, so that it became perfect and there was no deficiency in it (and it became) Christ, because he anointed him with his goodness for the invisible spirit. He revealed himself to him and (20) received the anointing through the (31.I) virginal spirit. (Ap. Jn. 30.10 - 31.I.

Foerster I. 109)

Acts of Thomas

At a wedding:

5. ....As they ate and drank, therefore, and garlands and ointments were brought, they each took ointment and one anointed his face, another his chin, and another other parts of his body. But the apostle anointed the top of his head, and smeared a little on his nostrils, put some drops also into his ears, touched also his teeth, and carefully anointed the parts round his heart.

(Acts of Thomas I. 5. Foerster I. 344)

This anointing has no connection with baptism, forming a part of the wedding celebrations.

The Gospel of Truth

Therefore they spoke to Christ in their (15) midst, in order that they who were disturbed should receive a return and that he should anoint them with the anointing.

The anointing is the compassion of the Father with which he will have compassion on them. But those whom he has anointed (20) are they who have been perfected. For the full vessels are anointed (= daubed). But when the anointing (= daubing) of one perishes, it flows out. And the cause (25) of its becoming defective is the thing (=place) from which its anointing comes off. For at that time a breath draws it, one in the power of him who is with him, But (30) with this one which is not defective, no seal is detached from it, nor is anything poured out, but the Father fills it again with that which it lacks that it may be (35) complete.

(The Gospel of Truth 36. 15-35. Foerster II. 66)

Again, this anointing is not related to a baptismal rite. It is given by Christ after his crucifixion when he has returned to the Pleroma. It seems, however, that if the one anointed is "defective" the anointing, or part of it, can be lost. As elsewhere in Gnostic writings, the words "perfection" and "seal" are associated with anointing.

## NOTES

- I. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*. Boston, 1963.  
p. xiv f.
2. M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford, 1924.
3. R. McL. Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem*. Oxford, 1958.  
p. I42 - I46.
4. *ibid.* p. 45 - 47.
5. H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p. 42f.
6. R. McL. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 4f; H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p.3f.
7. R. McL. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
8. *ibid.* p. 73.
9. *ibid.* p. 73f.
10. G.H.C. Macgregor and A.C. Purdy, *Jew and Greek: Tutors unto Christ*. Edinburgh, 1959. p. 3I5f.  
M. Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. London 1955.
- II. Rom. I4:7f.; 2 Cor. 5:I4f.; Gal. 2:I9f.; also Rom. 6:I f., and 6:II f.
- I2. Col. 2:I5; Ephes. 6:I0f.; also, 4:8f.
- I3. I Cor. I5:47.
- I4. Rom. I2:9f., I3:8f.; I Cor. I:I0f., 8:I3f., etc.
- I5. Rom. 6:I2, I2:I f.; Col. 5:6, etc.
- I6. C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*. London, 1952. p. I36f.
- I7. R. McL. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 7I, 72.
- I8. John I3:36, I4:5.
- I9. See, C.H. Dodd on Gnosticism in relation to John's Gospel: *The Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1953. p. I09f.
20. R. McL. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
- 2I. A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*. Leiden, 1962.  
p. I3, I4.
22. *ibid.* p. 54, 55.

23. *ibid.* p. 55.
24. *ibid.* p. 56, 57.
25. *ibid.* p. 57.
26. Acts of Thomas IO. I2I (gr.); W. Foerster, *Gnosis*. Oxford, 1972. vol. I, p. 337f.
27. Klijn, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
28. *ibid.* p. 59.
29. *ibid.* p. 59.
30. *ibid.* p. 59.
31. *ibid.* p. 60.

For additional background to Gnostic thought in general see: Bernard Layton, *The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection from Nag Hammadi*. Montana, 1979; and, Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. London, 1979.



8.

THE NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY

The Nag Hammadi Library <sup>I</sup> is a library in the true sense, because all of the works gathered within it, although they are all religious texts, were written at a variety of times by people with very divergent attitudes. Held in common by all the writing is a desire for an ultimate freedom which cannot be attained by material means but only through knowledge or wisdom. The original texts were translated from Greek into Coptic and some of the translations are very poor although others are more adequate, but some exist only in the Nag Hammadi collection and so it is impossible to judge the quality of the translation. A further complication is the physical condition of the books which were probably buried around 365AD., were discovered in 1945, but were not properly conserved until thirty years later due to difficulties in gathering together all the different discoveries both from the original finders and from subsequent buyers.

Those who originally compiled the works contained in this collection were Christians and many of the writings were by Christian authors who were probably more radically inclined than was the established Christian community, the Church, and who, as time went on, became increasingly unacceptable to the Church until the "gnostics" became classed as heretics <sup>2</sup>. Eventually gnosticism was removed from the Church and survived in small sects within the Christian Roman Empire, although it did survive outwith the Empire also, and a non-Christian form of it can be found today as a small sect called the Mandaeans (whose origins, however, seem very likely to have pre-dated Christianity. From the evidence of Nag Hammadi it must

be re-iterated that Gnosticism existed outwith Christianity and is a very wide and complex concept.

As the Dead Sea Scrolls were put in jars to preserve them, and as biblical manuscripts have been found similarly preserved along the Nile, so the Nag Hammadi Library was also saved, in a cliff at Jabal al- Tārif in the Nile Valley where it had lain for fifteen hundred years. The library, including the Jung Codex is now kept in the Coptic Museum of Old Cairo. The collection consists of twelve books, and eight leaves of a thirteenth book which were found inside the sixth book. Altogether there are fifty two tractates, of which six are duplicates and six were already extant in Greek or in translation in Latin or Coptic.

The publication of the Nag Hammadi Library in English provides extensive new source material which will facilitate a far closer and more factual study of Gnosticism.

The quotations which follow are those which make clear reference to baptism in water or to some related practice. There are other passages which contain references to water and to washing but because they seem to bear no relationship to any baptismal practice these have not been included here.

## The Tripartite Tractate

This is so named because the text falls into three parts. It contains a history of the universe from its beginning until the awaited "restoration of all things". The author regards the Father as the only divine being and speaks of him in terms of three members: Father, Son and Church. While the language of the Tractate is similar to that of the Valentinians, it contains elements which are not to be found in Valentinian writings.

The third section, from which the quotation given below comes, tells of how the Saviour entered the world to save mankind from death, to redeem the Church, and to "restore all things" to the Father. It says that only those who are spiritual people, along with the psychics who believe in Christ, will come to the Father through "Jesus the Lord" and through the "Holy Spirit".

I, 5. I27 .....As for the baptism which exists in the fullest sense, into which the Totalities will descend and in which they will be, there is no other baptism apart from this one alone, (30) which is the redemption into God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, when confession is made through faith in those names, (35) which are a single name of the gospel, I28 when they have come to believe what has been said to them, namely that they (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) exist. From this they have their salvation, those who have (5) believed that they exist. This is attaining in an invisible way to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in an undoubting faith. And when they (I0) have borne witness to them, it is also with a firm hope that they attain them, so that the return to them might become the perfection of those who have believed in them ( so that) (I5) the Father might be one with them, the Father, God whom they have confessed in faith and who gave (them) their union with

him in knowledge.

The baptism which we (20) previously mentioned is called "garment of those who do not strip themselves of it", for those who put it on and those who have received redemption wear it. It is also (25) called "the confirmation of the truth which has no fall". In an unwavering and immovable way he grasps those who have received the restoration (30) while they grasp him. (Baptism) is called "silence" because of the quiet and the tranquillity. It is also called "bridal chamber" because of the agreement and the (35) individual state of those who know that they have known him. It is also called I29 "the light which does not set and is without flame", since it does not give light, but those who have worn it are made into light. They (5) are the ones whom he wore. (Baptism) is called "the eternal life" which is immortality; and it is called "all that which it is" simply, (I0) in the proper sense of what is pleasing, inseparably and irremovably and faultlessly and imperturbably, to that which belongs to those who have received a beginning. For what else is there (I5) to name it apart from the designation "it is the Totalities"; That is, if it is given numberless names, they are spoken simply as a reference to it. (20) Just as it transcends every word and it transcends every voice and it transcends every mind and transcends everything and it transcends every silence, (25) so it is with those who are that which it is. This is that which they find it to be, (30) ineffably and inconceivably in (its) visage, for the coming into being in those who know, through him whom they have comprehended, who is the one to whom they gave glory.

(The Tripartite Tractate I, 5. I27, I28, I29.  
Robinson p. 93, 94)

I27 .....(30) Which is the redemption into God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.....

A trinitarian formula is linked with baptism as in orthodox practice. Since, however, there is no actual description of the rite itself, we have no indication of where it would fit in the baptismal order. The trinitarian formula occurs several times in this explanation of baptism, showing it to be an important concept. It is, therefore, probably safe to conclude that the formula would have been incorporated into the administration of the rite at some point.

The essential nature of faith and confession of that faith is emphasised, almost to the exclusion of "knowledge". This feature also contributes to its similarity to orthodox practices. It is not something which is gained by means of the baptism but is a pre-condition of baptism:

.....When confession is made through faith in those names (35), (ie. Father, Son and Holy Spirit)

I28 And when they (I0) have borne witness to them.

(I5) .....Whom they have confessed in faith.

(20) ..... Garment of those who do not strip themselves of it.

The white garment, put on after baptism, became part of the orthodox tradition, as did the candidates' stripping themselves of the old life. While this is not what is being described here, it is interesting to note that the idea of a garment which can be put on is associated with baptism. The "garment" referred to in the Tractate appears to be a metaphorical one and its colour is not specified, but the symbolism is probably similar. The "garment" is found also in the Mandaean rite, where it is a special white RASTA and is of great importance.

I29 ..... Those who have worn it are made into light.

Elsewhere, baptised Christians are spoken of as "enlightened" 3, and the light theme is to be found in the Mandaean rite in the form of the DRAVSHA banner,

and in the belief that those baptised are "clothed in light" <sup>4</sup>.

(5) (Baptism) is also called "the eternal life", which is immortality.

Whatever is understood by "eternal life", it is some kind of life which is not possessed before baptism; it is a new kind of life made possible or bestowed by baptism. Dying to the old life and rising to a new life is a theme found in the orthodox understanding of the baptismal rite, as in the Mandaean rite<sup>5</sup>, as well as in Gnosticism in general <sup>6</sup>.

#### The Gospel of Philip

The Gospel appears to be a Valentinian document containing a series of statements about sacraments and ethics. It has its name from the apostle Philip and was probably written during the second half of the third century AD. It is possible that it was composed for the instruction of catechumens. The Gospel is particularly concerned with the bridal chamber and states that the problems of mankind spring from the separation of the sexes, and so the re-union will be achieved through Christ in a bridal chamber which is sacramental and spiritual, and where one can have a foretaste of the ultimate union with a heavenly counterpart.

The sacraments recorded in the Gospel of Philip are similar to those of the orthodox Church of the period,

although the interpretation of them is distinctly Gnostic.

(p. I35) II. 57 It is through water and fire that the whole place is purified - the visible by the visible,<sup>(25)</sup> the hidden by the hidden. There are some things hidden through those visible. There is water in water, there is fire in a chrisim.

(p. I37) 6I God is a dyer.<sup>(15)</sup> As the good dyes, which are called "true", dissolve with the things dyed in them, so it is with those whom God has dyed. Since his dyes are immortal, they are immortal by means of his colours. Now God dips what he dips<sup>(20)</sup> in water.

(p. I38) 63 The Lord went into the dye works of Levi. He took seventy-two different colours and threw them into the vat. He took them out all white. And he said, "Even so has the Son<sup>(30)</sup> of Man come (as) a dyer".

(p. I39) 64 If one go down into the water and come up without having received anything and says, "I am a Christian",<sup>(25)</sup> he has borrowed the name at interest. But if he receive the Holy Spirit, he has the name as a gift. He who has received a gift does not have to give it back, but of him who has borrowed it at interest, payment is demanded. This is the way<sup>(30)</sup> (it happens to one) when one experiences a mystery.

(p. I40) 67 It is from water and fire that the soul and the spirit came into being. It is from water and fire and light that the son of<sup>(5)</sup> the bridal chamber (came into being). The fire is the chrisim, the light is the fire. I am not referring to that fire which has no form, but to the other fire whose form is white, which is bright and beautiful, and which gives beauty.

..... The Lord did everything in a mystery, a baptism, and a chrisim and a eucharist and a redemption<sup>(30)</sup> and a bridal chamber.

(p. I4I) 69 Through<sup>(5)</sup> the Holy Spirit we are indeed begotten again, but we are begotten through Christ in the two. We are anointed through the Spirit. When we were begotten we were united. None shall be able to see himself either in water or in<sup>(10)</sup> a mirror without light. Nor again will you be able to see in light without water or mirror. For this reason it is fitting to baptize in the two, in the light and the water. Now the light is the chrisim.

(p. I42) 69 There were three buildings specifically for<sup>(15)</sup> sacrifice in Jerusalem. The one facing west was called "the Holy". Another facing south was called "the Holy of the Holy". The third facing<sup>(20)</sup> east was called "the Holy of the Holies", the place where only the high priest enters. Baptism is the "Holy" building. Redemption is the "Holy of the Holy". "The Holy of the Holies"<sup>(25)</sup> is the bridal chamber. Baptism includes the resurrection (and the) redemption; the redemption (takes place) in the bridal chamber. But the bridal chamber is in that which is superior to (it and the others, because) you will not find (anything like) it.



(p.I42) 70 Jesus revealed <sup>(35)</sup> himself at the Jordan: it was the fullness of the Kingdom of heaven. He who was begotten before everything 71 was begotten anew. He who was once anointed was anointed anew. He who was redeemed in turn redeemed (others).

(p. I43) 72 Those <sup>(30)</sup>(who will be baptized go) down into the water. (But Christ, by coming) out (of the water), will consecrate it, (so that) they who have (received baptism) in his name (may be perfect). For he said, "(Thus) we should fulfill all 73 righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

(p. I44) 73 Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection while they live, when they die they will receive nothing. <sup>(5)</sup> So also when speaking about baptism they say, "Baptism is a great thing", because if people receive it they will live .....  
However it is from the olive tree that we get the chrism, and from the chrism, the resurrection.....

74 The chrism is superior to the baptism, for it is from the word "chrism" that we have been called "Christians", certainly not because <sup>(15)</sup> of the word "baptism". And it is because of the chrism that "the Christ" has his name. For the Father anointed the Son, and the Son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us. He who has been anointed possesses everything. He possesses <sup>(20)</sup> the resurrection, the light, the cross, the Holy Spirit. The Father gave him this in the bridal chamber; he merely accepted (the gift). The Father was in the Son and the Son in the Father. This is (the) Kingdom of heaven. <sup>(25)</sup>

(p. I46) 77 By perfecting the water of baptism, Jesus emptied it of death. Thus we do go <sup>(10)</sup> down into the water, but we do not go down into death in order that we may not be poured out into the spirit of the world. When that spirit blows, it brings the winter. When the Holy Spirit breathes, <sup>(15)</sup> the summer comes.

(The Gospel of Philip II, 57 - 77. Robinson p. I35 - I46)

57 "Water and fire": baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire is referred to in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, immediately following references to the cutting down and burning of fruitless trees. Chaff is burned in Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17. In John 15:6 those who fail to remain in him will be burned as are the branches which have been cut off the vine. Fire thus implies judgement which brings destruction to some in order to purify the community. This

element is linked with baptism in some of the gospels, particularly baptism with the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel of Philip 57 (25) it is linked with the anointing with chrism: ".... there is fire in a chrism". It should also be noted that the purification, in this instance, is not of individuals but of "the whole place".

57 (25) .... "There is water in water....": in his Refutation, Hippolytus speaks of a similar concept of water<sup>7</sup>, and the Mandaeans too believed in an invisible power or element in the water<sup>8</sup>.

64 "If one go down into the water and come up....."  
This implies immersion, although no specific description of the physical form of the baptismal practice is actually given. If immersion was the method employed it would, in this respect, at least, be following orthodox Christian practice.

64 ..... "And come up without having received anything and says, 'I am a Christian', (25) he has borrowed the name at interest. But if he receive the Holy Spirit....."

This suggests a strong sacramentalism in that it is believed one should receive the Holy Spirit in the water and only this gives one the right to call oneself a Christian; going down into the water and experiencing the physical rite is not enough in itself.

67 ..... "The Lord did everything in a mystery, a baptism, and a chrism and a eucharist and a redemption (30) and a bridal chamber."

This could be a list of six sacraments with redemption or salvation coming after baptism and eucharist, indicating that these were regarded as necessary before redemption

could become possible. It could also suggest some kind of hierarchical structuring of these, the candidate progressing from one stage to another until the "bridal chamber" is reached. This is perhaps the strangest of them and nowhere is the bridal chamber described or defined. It may be related to the gnostic belief that the spiritual and the material, or the male and the female, parts of man have been separated and must, therefore, be re-united. The bridal chamber could be associated with the idea of this union or re-union of the two parts of man. However, it remains an obscure concept although it is clearly an extremely important one, for it is the "Holy of the Holies", the highest of the three levels of experience:

69 (I5) ... "The Holy", "The Holy of the Holy" and  
(20) "The Holy of the Holies".

At this point it might be helpful to give a brief summary of E.H. Pagels' study of the "Valentinian Interpretation of Baptism and Eucharist - and its Critique of 'Orthodox' Sacramental Theology and Practice", or at least of the section concerned with baptism <sup>9</sup>.

Pagels begins by saying that the "fragments of Heracleon cited by Origen in his commentary on John show that Heracleon interpreted the sacraments in terms of Valentinian theology", and "criticised from this theological standpoint, the sacramental theology and practice of the 'great church'"<sup>10</sup>. Heracleon speaks of baptism in the context of the relationship of Jesus and John the Baptist <sup>11</sup>. For him, John is more than a prophet who baptises only in a physical sense, his baptism has an inner meaning and that is, "the baptism of repentance" and "forgiveness of sins"<sup>12</sup>. The baptism

offered by Christ, however, is different from this:

"The baptism offered by the visible Jesus on the one hand is for the remission of sins; but the redemption of the Christ, who descends on him, is for perfection. The first is the psychic, the second pneumatic. For the baptising of John is preached for repentance; but the redemption of the Christ who is in Jesus is ordained for perfection".<sup>I3</sup>

This, Irenaeus explains<sup>I4</sup>, is how Jesus, having been baptised by John can speak of "another baptism" which he must receive<sup>I5</sup>. John can give only physical and psychical (for repentance and forgiveness) baptism, but the Saviour offers baptism on all these levels:

- i) he baptises with water;
- ii) he offers a baptism "of repentance";
- iii) and the third baptism he offers is the "redemption" - this conveys the Spirit and is "for perfection". This is initiation into the highest gnosis, and is thus available only to the elect.

In Heracleon's view, the orthodox Christians practice only the physical rite which may reach the second psychic level, but Heracleon regards psychics as limited to a view of salvation which is attained "through works"<sup>I6</sup>. Irenaeus sees that this view devalues "the meaning and effect of the Church's sacrament". He says that this doctrine was introduced by Satan to negate "the baptism of regeneration into God" and to destroy "the whole faith"<sup>I7</sup>. Pagels says that this Valentinian critique of the orthodox rite, which considers it to be lacking in spiritual gifts, does in fact correspond to what was apparently the generally accepted view within the second century Church<sup>I8</sup>.

The Valentinians, therefore, considered the Orthodox rite of baptism to consist of a washing of the body, and a release from the prospect of death, and forgiveness of sins. Pneumatic baptism, however, releases the spiritual from the psychic aspects of a person's existence and unifies him with his pleroma which is the Mother and Father beyond, but the Church gives only the baptism of John, which is not the highest level of experience<sup>19</sup>. The orthodox Christian, therefore, would never experience the "bridal chamber" which is the "Holy of the Holies".

69 (10)....."For this reason it is fitting to baptize in the two, in the light and the water. Now the light is the chrism."

Baptised Christians are frequently referred to as "enlightened": those who have reached or experienced the light. The Mandaeans, too, emphasise light, by the presence of the DRAVSHA (banner), which is a light symbol, at their major baptismal feasts, and which all the candidates must grasp before going down into the water. In this passage light is more obviously emphasised. It is clearly of great importance. The baptismal rite would not be complete without it, and it comes, not through the water, but through the anointing.

72 (30) ..."(But Christ, by coming) out (of the water), will consecrate it, ....."

Such links with Jesus' own baptism are not evident in the early orthodox rite.

74 (10) ..... "The chrism is superior to the baptism.....".

This is consistent with the emphasis placed on the importance placed on light which comes through the anointing in 69 (10).

It is also consistent with references to anointing found in the Gospel of Thomas.

An additional reference to anointing could be mentioned here:

(I50, I5I) 85 The holies<sup>(20)</sup> of the holies were revealed, and the bridal chamber invited us in.

As long as it is hidden, wickedness is indeed ineffectual, but it has not been removed from the midst of the the seed of the Holy Spirit. They are slaves of evil. But when<sup>(25)</sup> it is revealed, then the perfect light will flow out on every one. And all those who are in it will receive the chrism. Then the slaves will be free and the captives ransomed. "Every plant which<sup>(30)</sup> my father who is in heaven has not planted will be plucked out" (Matthew 15:13). Those who are separated will be united and filled. Every one who will enter the bridal chamber will kindle the light, for it burns just as in the marriages which are observed, though they happen<sup>(35)</sup> at night. ...86 .....If anyone becomes a son of the bridal chamber, he will receive the light.

The bridal chamber and the anointing with chrism are as closely linked here as baptism and chrism are linked elsewhere in the Gospel. Light, another important feature of the baptismal rite is found here also. All those who enter and who receive the chrism will be set free from their enslavement to ignorance and evil. The bridal chamber seems to have great eschatological significance as well as more immediate benefits:

86 He who will receive that light will not be seen, nor can he be detained. And none shall be able to torment<sup>(I0)</sup> a person like this even while he dwells in the world. And again when he leaves the world he has already received the truth in the images. The world has become the aeon, for the aeon is fullness for him.<sup>(I5)</sup> This is the way it is: it is revealed to him alone, not hidden in the darkness and the night, but hidden in a perfect day and a holy light.

"The chrism is superior to the baptism" (74 (I0) ) and the bridal chamber appears to be superior to both.

## On the Origin of the World

This tractate takes the form of an apologetic for Gnosticism, setting out for those outwith this experience the Gnostic approach to understanding the world. It does not fit into any one gnostic system but contains Sethian, Valentinian and Manichaeian elements, and was probably written in Alexandria at the end of the third century or the beginning of the fourth century AD.

After speaking of Chaos, Adam and Eve, Wisdom and Jesus, the tractate ends with light triumphing over darkness and life over death.

(p. 176) II. 122 There are three men and his descendants in the world until the consummation of the aeon: the spiritual and the vital and the material. This is like (I0) the three shapes of Phoenixes of Paradise: the first is immortal, the second attains one thousand years, as for the third it is written in "the Holy Book" that "he is consumed." Likewise three baptisms exist: the first is (I5) spiritual, the second is a fire, the third is water.

Three different types of baptism are referred to in this passage but are not described or explained. They could be similar to those spoken of by Irenaeus<sup>20</sup> and possibly also in "A Valentinian Exposition"<sup>21</sup> where reference seems to be made to more than one kind of baptism, but this document is so fragmentary that it is difficult to tell whether or not there is any real similarity.

## A Valentinian Exposition

This is a Valentinian work which speaks of the origin of creation and of redemption in terms of the myth of Sophia, and it is the only Valentinian document to do this. The

first part is possibly a kind of secret catechism for candidates for initiation into Gnosticism. It proceeds to talk about the Gnostic Christian understanding of anointing, baptism and eucharist. (Although it is basically a Valentinian work, it nevertheless disagrees with some of the views of Valentinus and his disciple Ptolemy.)

Anointing provides protection to those who receive it:

40 (I0) ..... and anoint us so that we might be able (I5) to trample upon the snakes and the heads of the scorpions and all the power of the Devil.

(Robinson p. 440)

There is clearly more than one baptism known to the author:

41 (I0) The first baptism is the forgiveness of sins.

Whether by the first baptism or by a subsequent one, they are brought:

42 (I0) from the world into John and from the great bitterness of the world into the sweetness of God, from the carnal into the spiritual, (I5) from the physical into the angelic, from the created into the Pleroma, from the world into the Aeon, from the (20) slaves into sonship, from entanglements into one another.....

(Robinson p. 441 )

The effects of baptism described here are not unlike those attributed to the bridal chamber in the Gospel of Philip (85 (20) f. )

### The Gospel of the Egyptians

This is a Sethian work, mythological in nature, recording the salvation-history of Sethian Gnostics. It can be divided into four main sections, the second of which contains the passage quoted below. This section speaks of the origin, history and salvation of the race of Seth. Seth comes down from heaven for his work of salvation, putting on



Jesus as a garment. Baptism is an important part of his work of salvation.

(p. 203) III, 63 He (ie. the great Seth) passed through (5) the three parousias which I mentioned before: the flood, and the conflagration, and the judgement of the archons and the powers and the authorities, to save her (the race) who went astray, through the reconciliation of the world, and (IO) the baptism through a Logos-begotten body which the great Seth prepared for himself.....

(p. 204) But from now on 66 through the incorruptible man Poimael and they who are worthy of (the) invocation, the renunciations of the five seals in the spring-baptism, these will (5) know their receivers as they are instructed about them, and they will know them (or: be known) by them. These will by no means taste death.

These passages seem to imply that the Incarnation took place primarily to make baptism possible, giving a far greater importance to baptism in relation to the Incarnation than is indicated by New Testament sources.

66 "The renunciation of the five seals".

This could be comparable to the Renunciation of the Devil and all his works found in the Hippolytean rite<sup>22</sup>.

66 "..... They are instructed about them."

This might be an indication of a period of instruction prior to initiation.

Baptism also seems to give protection from death:

"These will be no means taste death."

### The Apocalypse of Adam

Although Seth and his descendants play a notable part in this tractate it is not at all clear that it is itself a Sethian document. The Apocalypse draws on Jewish apocalyptic tradition and could be a work from a period of transition from Jewish to Gnostic apocalyptic, which

means that its dating could be very early, possibly in the first or second century AD. It does not contain any clearly Christian elements.

The tractate records a revelation received by Adam and passed on to his son Seth. Water is spoken of throughout the Apocalypse and baptism is mentioned several times<sup>23</sup>, but it would be difficult to relate these references to any rite of baptism. The writer certainly links baptism with knowledge, which is a common concept in Gnostic writings.

(p264) V, 85 These are the revelations which (20) Adam made known to Seth his son. And his son taught his seed about them. This is the hidden knowledge of Adam, which he gave to Seth, which is the (25) holy baptism of those who know the eternal knowledge.....

Baptism thus seems to be equated with knowledge, with no reference to water or anointing in relation to this.

#### The Paraphrase of Shem

The Paraphrase is a non-Christian Gnostic work, loosely based on Old Testament material, particularly from Genesis. It speaks of a redeemer who bears some similarity to the New Testament descriptions of the Redeemer, although these elements are probably pre-Christian. It speaks of three primaevial powers: Light, Darkness, and Spirit between them. The Darkness attacks the Spirit to try to increase his own power but is ignorant of the Light. The redeemer is Derdekeas who descends to rescue the light of the Spirit who has been trapped, and also the mind of Darkness.

(p. 321) VII 30 ..... For at that time the demon will also appear upon the river to baptize with an (25) imperfect baptism, and to trouble the world with a bondage of water.....

(p. 322) 3I ..... And I have taken the light of the Spirit from the frightful water. For when the 15) appointed days of the demon draw near - he who will baptize erringly -, then I shall appear in the baptism of the demon to reveal (20) with the mouth of Faith a testimony to those who belong to her.

(p. 324) 36 And many who wear erring flesh will go down to the harmful waters through the winds and the demons. and they are bound by the water. (30) And he will heal with a futile remedy. He will lead astray, and he will blind the world:.....

37 ..... 0 Shem, it is necessary that the mind be called by the word in order that the bondage of the power of the Spirit may be saved from the frightful (10) water. And it is blessedness if it is granted someone to contemplate the exalted one, and to know the exalted time and the bondage. For the water is an (5) insignificant body. And men are not released, since they are bound in the water, just as from the beginning the light of the Spirit was bound.

0 Shem, they are deceived (20) by manifold demons, thinking that through baptism with the uncleanness of water, that which is dark, feeble, idle, (25) (and) disturbing, he will take away sins. And they do not know that from the water to the water there is bondage, and error and unchastity, (30) envy, murder, adultery, false witness, heresies, robberies, lusts, babblings, wrath, bitterness, (35) great ..... 38 Therefore there are many deaths which burden their minds. For I foretell it to those who have a heart. (5) They will refrain from the impure baptism.

(The Paraphrase of Shem VII 30, 25 - 37, 5. Robinson, p. 321 - 324)

The writer clearly believes baptism to be harmful, even demonic. Whether he has a specific baptiser, sect or form of baptism in mind is not stated. Mandaean literature describes Jesus as one who gives a false baptism<sup>24</sup> and it also speaks of Nbu Christ in a similar way<sup>25</sup>. The Mandaeans, however, practised their own forms of baptism. The Manicheans,<sup>26</sup> on the other hand, rejected any form of baptism: an attitude which appears close to the one expounded in the Paraphrase.

## Conclusion

The early Christian Gnostic systems (for example, the cult of Simon Magus) appear to have been partly distortions of mainstream Christianity and partly original concepts, for the later systems such as those of Saturninus and the Ophites were very complex and owe little, if anything, to any other known religions or sects. Many of the baptismal practices of the gnostics resemble those employed within the Christian rite and in some cases the recorded usages are prior to any, extant, records of their use in mainstream Christianity, although it is possible that it is the records rather than the practice which are earlier. It does, however, raise the question of whether the Church adopted into its baptismal rite practices already employed by gnostic sects, and if so was there a general movement towards gnosticism? Or did the Church's rite develop in complete isolation from the gnostic one and employ similar usages merely by chance? It is difficult to imagine how any aspect of the Church's life could develop in total isolation from what was happening around it, whether or not it was in agreement with this. It is more likely that some gnostic influences, among others, did penetrate the orthodox Church, possibly affecting outward practices rather than basic beliefs. For while there are very notable similarities in the practice of the baptismal rite, there are fundamental differences, particularly seen in later gnosticism, which preclude the possibility of absolutely identical rites. Similarities such as calling on "the name", anointing with oil, "sealing", exorcism, consecration of the waters, the preference for running water, the element of secrecy,

and so on, are outweighed by the concept in gnosticism of a distant God, of the body as evil and, therefore, rejection of any belief in the incarnate God, also, the overriding importance of knowledge, belief in a previous heavenly baptism which has released them from sin, and among some, such as the Nicolaitans, complete rejection of any ethical demands, and, as in the Paraphrase of Shem, rejection of the practice of baptism.

It cannot be denied that many of the similarities are striking and these are very important. However, the importance of any practice or rite or observance lies in what one believes about it, and gnostic beliefs about baptism, especially in the later systems, could not have been the same as those of orthodox Christianity and any comparison of the rites has to be held in this perspective.

## NOTES

- I. Quotations and introductory notes are based on "The Nag Hammadi Library in English, ed. J. Robinson. Leiden, 1977.
2. At the beginning of the second century, 2 Timothy 2:16-18 warns against two such Gnostics: Hymenaeus and Philetus.
3. eg. Justin, Apology I, 61: "This washing is called illumination since they who learn these things are illuminated in their understanding". Also, Clement of Alexandria, Instructor I vi. 25.3f. and 30.2; 32.1.
4. See p. 199 (cf. p. 201) below.
5. See p. 207, 208 below.
6. cf. Gospel of Philip II, 3 (Robinson op. cit. p. 144).
7. See p. 146 above.
8. See p. 199, 207, 209 below.
9. E.H. Pagels, Harvard Theological Review, 65. 1972. p. 153f.
10. ibid. p. 153; cf. A. E. Brooke, The Fragments of Heracleon. Cambridge, 1891.
11. Pagels, op. cit., p. 154; Origen, Commentary on John, XIX 3, ed. E. Preuschen. G.C.S. X. p. 300, 20f.
12. Pagels, op. cit., 155; Origen op. cit., VI 20. G.C.S. X. p. 129, 32 - 130, 5.
13. Pagels, op. cit., p. 157.
14. W.W. Harvey, Sancti Irenaei I. XXI. 2. Cambridge, 1857. p. 182.
15. Mk. 10:38; Lke. 12:50.
16. Pagels, op. cit., p. 158; Origen, op. cit., XII. 60. G.C.S. X. p. 292, 1f.
17. Pagels, op. cit., p. 158; Irenaeus, op. cit., I XXI I. Harvey I, p. 181.
18. Pagels, op. cit., p. 158; cf. A. von Harnack, History of Dogma II. New York, 1961. p. 140.
19. Pagels, op. cit., p. 161, 162.
20. See p. 182 above.

21. Valentinian Exposition XI. 40, 30 - 43, I8. Robinson  
op. cit., p. 44I.
22. Apostolic Tradition XXI (See p.23 f. above).
23. See Robinson, op. cit., p. 26I - 263.
24. See p.I94 below.
25. See p.2I2 below.
26. See p.223 and 225 below.

9.

THE BAPTISMAL PRACTICES OF THE MANDAEANS



"Mandai" or "Mandaeans" is the formal name by which that group of people - a very small group found in Iraq and Iran - colloquially known as the "subba" (sing. Subbi), call themselves. The title "Subba" comes from outsiders who so identify them because of the chief feature of their cult: immersion. It appears that they have also been known as "Mughtasila", those who wash themselves, and according to the mistaken view of Al-Fihrist,<sup>1</sup> Mani the founder of Manichaeism was born into this sect which occupied the marshes of Lower Iraq. Another title by which they have been known is the "Christians of Saint John".<sup>2</sup> They would not, however, claim that their sect had been founded by John, but recognise him as a great teacher and would attribute certain changes in their cult to him (eg., the reduction of prayer from five times a day to three). They teach that he was a Nasurai (ie. skilled in the priestly craft and healing bodies as well as souls). Jesus also is seen as a Nasurai, but as one who went astray as a heretic, baptising in "cut-off water" and making religion easier. However, most of the practices, such as the use of "cut-off" water and celibacy, which horrify the Mandaeans most, come from Byzantine Christianity. Drower suggests that the title, "Christians of Saint John", was coined by the Mandaeans as one useful in gaining toleration by Christians.<sup>3</sup>

There has been much debate regarding the title "Nasurai". Lidzbarski suggests that it means "observers",<sup>4</sup> for the Nasurai was indeed an observer of the stars and constellations, and the secret knowledge of this was

passed on from one priest to another. Another suggestion has been that it seems to come from the Syriac root NSR: to "chirp", "twitter" (as a bird); "utter broken sounds" (as a magician); "chant", "sing praises".<sup>5</sup> This also would fit since every Mandaean ceremony must be accompanied by a formula: to speak someone's name forces their presence, and prayers, except very personal ones, are always spoken aloud.<sup>6</sup>

### Place of Origin

There is no clear statement of this. From various legends and traditions, however, and from the text of the Haran Gawaitha<sup>7</sup> there are indications that a community which held beliefs similar to those of the Mandaeans occupied a mountainous region in the area of Harran (at least, Harran has something to do with the region), and that there was a group in Jerusalem of the same faith and which later moved south. The indications also are that "Maddai", or "Mandai" at that time had no religious connotations, and that the beliefs held by them were similar to those of Mazdaism or of early Zoroastrianism, and to some of the Babylonian sects.

### The Rasta

The rasta or, as in the writings, USTILIA, is worn at all religious events: baptism, marriage, death.<sup>8</sup> It is made of white material, symbolising the light which surrounds the pure soul, and every Mandaean must have

one. The priestly rasta has seven pieces and the lay rasta has five, according to the priests of Qal at Salih, and according to those of Amarah, the priest has nine pieces and the layman seven. By either reckoning, the two additional priestly pieces are: the TAGHA or crown (A tubular fillet of white silk or cotton<sup>9</sup>); and the SHOM (written SHUM) YAWAR: a gold ring worn on the little finger of the right hand.

The rasta is ritually very important in that if it is wrongly worn or becomes polluted or lost, the priest must observe lengthy rituals of purification, and if his rasta is disarranged while administering a rite, that rite is not valid. Also, if someone does not die wearing his rasta his soul cannot reach Abathus.

Similarities between the RASTA and such Christian garments as baptismal robes, wedding dress, the priest's surplice and stole, and the shroud, should be noted.<sup>10</sup> Also worth noting is the Mandaean priest's staff which is carried when he is officiating at any ritual, as is the bishop's crook. The wreath or garland is similar to the crown recorded as being employed after the end of the third century in Eastern rites of Christian baptism<sup>11</sup>. A ring too is worn by Christian bishops.

Unlike so many of the practices cited in any consideration of the influences upon Christian baptism, the Mandaean rite is still practised to this day. They are to be found in the areas along the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, and along the Karun in Iranian Huzistan. They

have their own religious cult and their own literature which is wholly religious. It has been claimed that they are successors of John the Baptist, but from studies made of their language and literature <sup>12</sup> and of their religious history <sup>13</sup> it is clear that their existence goes back long before the Christian era.

Throughout the Mandaean religion the constant is the worship of the principles of life and fertility. "The Great Life" personifies the life-force of the universe, although this personification is not highly developed, remaining always mysterious and abstract. The symbol of the Great Life is YARDNA (living or flowing water) <sup>14</sup>, which is not surprising in a society dependent for their existence on the Tigris and Euphrates: the Egyptians worshipped the river Nile as a deity. It is, therefore, natural that a main cultic rite is immersion in this water. Also central to worship is the life-giving power of light which is personified in Melka d Nhura and MELKI (light spirits) who are believed to be responsible for the gifts of health, strength, virtue and justice. <sup>15</sup>

It should be noted that the Mandaeans are not a cult of Judaism, but do bear similarities to it and to other sects. For, their emphasis on both the care of the body and the care of the mind is similar to that of the Zoroastrians, and is also characteristic of the cults of Anu and Ea in Sumerian times, and of Bel and Ea in Babylonian times. <sup>16</sup>

Another aspect of their worship is belief in the immortality of the soul, and in the assistance that the souls of the dead can give to the living.<sup>17</sup>

Although the origins of Mandaeism cannot be traced either to John or Christ, there were obviously lines of communication between them for the Mandaeans to have such knowledge of them both, and also of the Old Testament, some of whose stories are to be found in the Creation and Flood legends of Mandaeism: Adam and Noh (not Noah), and the crossing of the Red Sea, along with references throughout the legends to the Jews, Jerusalem, Egypt and John the Baptist.

This kind of communication is important in speaking of the Mandaean and Christian baptismal rites. One could not claim that here in the Mandaean cult lies the origin of the Christian sacrament of baptism, but one can respect it as a thread in the whole pattern of water rites of the ancient world in which Christianity and its rites were born and in which they developed. In the Mandaean cult we find a rite which is, perhaps, closer to the Christian than any other, yet it is part of a religion and culture far older than Christianity and with no background of Judaism.

### Baptism

Baptism is central to Mandaeism. Immersion into water is, to a certain extent, immersion into Life itself, which gives protection against death and the promise of

everlasting life, and serves the purpose of purifying from sin and any other uncleanness.<sup>18</sup> For the Mandaean, therefore, water is not only the symbol of Life but is in some way Life. Much of the water, they believe, is only physical water, but one part in nine is life-giving and spiritual, and it is this which produces the effect of baptism: protecting and purifying the body and the soul, and guaranteeing eternal life.<sup>19</sup> Water reflects light which gives health and strength, virtue and justice, and the water is, therefore, considered to be itself a form of light bestowing these things also, and so someone just baptised is said to be "clothed in light": a concept which is not unlike the one which causes newly-baptised members of the early Church to be called "enlightened" or "illuminated". There is also a similarity to the Gnostic emphasis on the importance of light, although the Gnostics linked it to the anointing rather than to the actual immersion in water.<sup>20</sup>

When immersion into water takes place along with certain prescribed prayers and actions, both the candidate and the administrator experience the spiritual or heavenly element of the water. (The formulae and actions are essential if this experience is to be achieved.) There are three kinds of ritual washing:

i) RISHAMA : no priest is necessary. Those going into the water say the prayers for themselves, and the rite takes place before sunrise each day and before each religious observance.<sup>21</sup>

ii) TAMASHA : again, no priest is necessary. This rite

consists of total triple immersion and is considered necessary after menstruation, childbirth, and any other defilement. (After childbirth the Masbuta is also necessary.)<sup>22</sup>

iii) MASBUTA: Drower calls this "full" baptism, which must always be followed by the sacraments of oil, bread and water; by the offering of the hand and the giving of a kiss ("giving of KUSHTA"). The rite is completed by the priest laying his hand on the candidate's head in blessing. <sup>23</sup>

This rite is administered by a priest, taking place always on a Sunday and at certain feasts - especially at the great feast of Panja. It is necessary after major defilements: marriage, birth, contact with the dead, illness, a journey, and so on. Unlike the Christian rite it is not once-for-all; the attitude of the Mandaeans themselves is rather that the more often they receive baptism the better.

#### The Baptismal Rite

This is performed in the Mandi enclosure. Within the enclosure is the Mandi or cult hut, which is constructed of mud and reeds and which must have, in front of it, its own baptismal pool. The enclosure is always built on a river bank and is surrounded by a wall of mud or by a reed fence, which prevents outsiders seeing the baptismal rite, which is to be kept secret from them. This attitude is similar to that of third and fourth

century Christianity which employed the disciplina arcani, whereby the practices of Christianity are not explained to the catechumen until after baptism, with the rite of baptism itself remaining secret until it is experienced.<sup>24</sup>

Because immersion must be into flowing water, as demanded for baptism in the Didache,<sup>25</sup> the Mandaean pool is serviced by two channels - one which carries water into the pool and one which carries water away. If the flow of water slows down too much during the rite everything has to stop until the channels have been sufficiently cleared to allow the water to flow freely again.

Before the rite itself takes place there is the RAHMI: the consecration of the priest, of his rasta, and of the cult objects. If the rite takes place at Panja (the great baptismal feast), a DRAVSHA - a banner which is a light symbol - is erected. At the beginning of the ceremony the candidates come forward in groups and grasp with their right hands the bottom of the Dravsha's staff and then the top of the staff.

They then go down into the water for the triple immersion one by one, and when they come out they walk around the fire which has been lit, around the TORIANA - the table for the sacraments- and the Dravsha. When all have been baptised the whole group is signed with oil; they receive the Kushta and then the sacramental bread - the PIHTHA. This is followed by the MAMBUHA: the laying on of the hand on the candidate's head, and then the final



handshake.

Drower describes a baptism which she herself witnessed.<sup>26</sup>

This rite took place in a river because there was no Mandi enclosure in the area, but this is the only way in which it differs from the traditional rite:

"The woman to be baptised (she has been in childbed and it is the fourth Sunday following the birth), wearing a black ABA<sup>27</sup> (mantle) over her rasta, stands on the bank and repeats a formula after the GANZOWRA<sup>28</sup> and then wades out to him. She dips under completely three times, while he, standing before her, splashes water back at her. She advances to the right of the Ganzowra, who takes her and dips her forehead three times beneath the water, and then 'signs' her by passing his hand three times across her forehead from right to left and invests her with the myrtle wreath. She drinks three times from the hollow of his hand.....

"All make their way back to the house, the Ganzowra not pausing in his prayer. The baptised woman, dripping wet, places herself before the Ganzowra, with her back to him. He takes a little sesame from a bag, makes a paste of it with a little water in a KETHA<sup>29</sup>, and smears it across the forehead of the woman three times, she crouching before him on her heels.....

"The Ganzowra then takes the PEHTHA<sup>30</sup> and gives it to her to eat, and next, pours water from the QANINA<sup>31</sup> into the Keptha and gives it to her to drink. When she has done so, he pours a second time into the Keptha and she drinks again. A third time he pours in water, but this she throws over her left shoulder while he says, 'For thy left'. He lays his hand on her head and prays.....

"A little more prayer and the rite is concluded, having lasted exactly two hours".

Several aspects of rites such as these are similar to the Christian baptismal practice:

- a) The injunction to baptise in "living water" or "flowing water" is found in both.
- b) The element of secrecy found in the Mandaean rite is also developed in the Christian one, although the disciplina arcani was observed more closely in some areas of the Church than in others.

c) The concept of purification, mentioned earlier, with the candidate going into the water black and coming out white, which coincides with part of the Christian idea of baptism, along with the wearing of the white rasta for immersion, may be related to the Christian practice of putting on a white garment after coming out of the font.

d) Triple immersion and the employment of set prayers or formulae are also a feature of the Christian rite.

e) The sacraments which are always received after the immersion occupy the same place as the Christian Eucharist in the baptismal ceremony.

f) Signing with oil is part of the Christian rite also; the sign or seal being found in both orthodoxy and Gnosticism.

g) Likewise the laying on of hands.

h) The Mandaean handshake could well be the equivalent of the "Right Hand of Fellowship" offered in the Reformed Church to those admitted to full membership of the Church or being ordained to an office within it.

i) Another similarity is the KLILA or myrtle wreath which each candidate is given. He keeps it on the small finger of his right hand until, in the pool, the priest places it on his head - like a crown. The giving of a crown is found in some later Christian rites<sup>32</sup>.

#### Infant Baptism

If the child is a boy, he is baptised on the Sunday after the thirtieth day of his birth; if a girl, on the thirty

second day (ie. the Sunday after the thirty second day). However, some mothers prefer not to wait until the specified time has elapsed, but have the infant baptised immediately, since if the child dies before it is baptised it will be unable to enter the world of light and will have to wait until the end of the world when it will be baptised in the heavenly Euphrates.<sup>33</sup>

During the baptism of an infant an HALLALI - a layman specially chosen and ritually clean - acts as the father of the child. For the occasion, the child is dressed in a rasta and klila, and is carried down into the water by the Hallali where it is immersed three times while the priest splashes water over its head. It is then given three sips of water and is signed with water across its forehead. The klila is placed on its head and both come up out of the water. More prayers are said at the toriana (the table for the elements), and the child is handed to a SHGANDA (an acolyte) who returns it to its mother. After all this the priest anoints the child and gives the kushta.

If the child dies during the rite, as often happens, according to Drower,<sup>34</sup> a model is made of dough, dressed in the child's rasta, and the ceremony continues with the dough model taking the place of the child.

In this rite there are quite striking similarities to the Christian rite:

a) Belief that the child must be baptised if it is to enter heaven, or the world of light, is found also

among some Christians today. Although they would not go so far as to have a dummy baptised in the child's place , a very similar way of thinking often lies behind the desire of parents, particularly those who would want no other involvement with the Church, to have their children baptised. (This kind of thinking grows also out of a confused and confusing doctrine of baptism.)

b) The white rasta worn by the Mandaean child could equally well be a description of the white christening robes worn by infants brought for Christian baptism today.

c) Total triple immersion of the child would have been the method employed by the Church when it first baptised infants since adults were immersed in this way and no special rite was introduced for infants. (Hippolytus allows for the baptism of young children but gives no separate instructions for this, so that the procedure followed was presumably the same as for adults.)

d) The Hallali sounds very much like the Christian god-father who carries the child to the font for baptism.

e) As part of the Mandaean baptismal rite, the priest signs the child's forehead with water. This is the most common method of "baptising" children in the Church today.

f) The handing of the child to the Shganda is similar to the practice in some reformed churches of handing the child, after it has been baptised, to an Elder who later hands it back to its mother.

g) Anointing has formed part of the Christian baptismal

rite since at least the second century, and children are still anointed as part of their baptism in the orthodox churches to this day.

#### Baptism in Mandaean Literature

Mandaean texts were always hand-copied by the priestly scribes; the priestly classes being the only ones able to read or write. Since it is highly probable that the doctrines, rituals, prayers, and so on, were memorised long before they were ever written down, it is very difficult to establish the date of their origin, especially as there are few historical references within them <sup>35</sup>.

The passages cited here are from the Ginza <sup>36</sup> and the Qolasta. <sup>37</sup>GINZA means "treasure", and is also known by the title, "The Great Book". There are two main sections of the Ginza: the Right Ginza (GR), and the Left Ginza (GL) which is shorter. The Right Ginza is a collection of eighteen tractates - mainly didactic, mythological and cosmological, while the Left Ginza is concerned with the soul and its "ascent" to the world of light. For this reason it is also called the "Book of Souls". QOLASTA means "praise" and has come to mean "collection" (of religious songs). It is the canonical prayer book of the Mandaeans and consists of hymns, songs, prayers, instructions for cultic ceremonies - particularly for baptisms and masses for the dead. Both the Ginza and the Qolasta were translated by M. Lidzbarski. <sup>38</sup>The passages quoted here are to be found in W. Foerster's

book "Gnosis".<sup>39</sup>

"Praised be all the Jordans of living water  
Praised be all the fruits, grapes and trees, which  
stand by them." (ML Qol. 58. Foerster II p.154)

This is an example of the emphasis placed upon fertility in their worship: a very primitive worship of water and its power rather than a highly-developed sacramentalism. It is a worship of that upon which their basic physical existence depends.

"The great Jordan.....  
Plants grow beside it, happy and rejoicing."  
(GR III. Foerster II pp. 155,6)

Again there is emphasis on fertility, although this passage does continue into complex descriptions of the origins of life and of the jordans.

In the same tractate the Jordan is described as coming into being in the great fruit which was itself created: "By the power of the King of Light" - who also brought life into being. From the living water Life itself comes, and this reference to Life seems to be to something divine. If this is so, it means that water is regarded as being the origin of divine life and not just of material life. (Which would be similar to the ancient Egyptian belief in the powers of the Nile.)

Throughout this passage there is a dual emphasis on light and water, and it is the light which is greater, for nothing existed before the light. This is similar to the Gnostic emphasis on light:

"......Therefore it is fitting to baptise in the two, in the light and the water, but the light is the anointing".

And:

"The anointing is superior to the baptism".  
(Gospel of Philip 75 and 95)

Thus, in Gnosticism light is more important than water,  
which is also the implication in this Mandaean passage  
which says that "Nothing was when light was not".

"The great Jordan was brought into being,  
there came into being the living water.  
The radiant and resplendent water was brought into being  
and from the living water, I, the Life,  
was brought into being." (GR III Foerster II p.157)

"Nothing was when the water was not;  
the water is prior to the darkness.  
Prior to the darkness is the water." (ibid. p.165)

The jordans (baptismal streams) are related to a  
heavenly Jordan, and water is seen as containing life,  
as mentioned above, and there is also emphasis on the  
primordial power of water: water existed before any  
other physical thing, before anything other than the  
light.

"Hence the water gushed forth  
and the union with this world was effected."  
(GR XV Foerster II p.185)

Water here seems to be regarded as the agent of the  
union. The Gnostic "bridal chamber" is a place or  
sacrament of some kind of union, and seems to be linked  
(it possibly follows baptism) with washing in water.  
Tertullian also has a similar reference to water as  
uniting body and soul at baptism.

"The Great Life spoke to Manda dHaiye: Arise, you,  
proceed to the head of the waters and draw off a  
narrow channel of living water. Let it flow out and  
fall into the turbid water and the water will become  
tasty so that the children of men may drink it and  
become like the Great Life." (GR XI Foerster II pp.185,6)

The contrast between living water and still water, and the efficacy of the living water is stressed. The passage expresses the belief that water can bestow eternal life upon the soul, and it is this concept which is particularly strong in the desire to have infants baptised as early as possible.

The following quotation is from the Book of John<sup>40</sup> (drasa Dyahya) or the Book of Kings (ie. Angels). It is a mixed collection of texts with thirty seven sections of varying length, and it was, perhaps, a supplement to the Ginza. Its content is mainly mythological with some tracts on John the Baptist.

".....Thereupon Hibil Ziwa raised his hand and wrenched the jaws of Ur and seized the souls who had received the sign of life and invoked the name of Manda dHaiye".  
(Foerster II p.221)

The sign of life: "signing" is a term used of the anointing or of one of the anointings in second century Christian baptism.<sup>41</sup> The sign or seal in Gnostic thought (as in the Acts of Thomas) acts as a protection against demons and other evils. The selectivism is also worth noting: only those who have been signed are saved. It is this concept, or one very like it which attaches itself to Christian baptism as the rite develops.

"Let the Jordan flow freely and baptise you. Baptise your souls with the living baptism, which I (Hibil Ziwa) have brought you from the world of light, by which all perfect and believing men are baptised. And recite the blessing over the Pihta and consume it, and recite the praise over the Mambuha and drink it, so that there may be a remitter of sins and debts for you. Every person who is marked with the "Sign of Life" and over whom the name of the King of Light is pronounced, and (every person) who is firm and steadfast in (or: through) baptism and performs good and pleasing



deeds, will not be impeded by anyone on his way (to the place of light). (GR I Foerster II p.277)

This passage contains some instructions regarding baptism, and a statement of some of the things achieved through baptism. Emphasis is again placed on the importance of the "signing" and also on the use of the "name", and it is this same emphasis which we find over and over again in Christian sources. The same is true of the moral obligations placed on those who have been baptised.

"You have been marked with the Sign of Life, the name of the Life and the name of Manda dHaiye have been pronounced over you. You have been baptised with the baptism of Bihram-Rabba, son of the Mighty (Life). May your baptism protect you and be successful. The name of the Life and the name of Manda dHaiye have been pronounced over you." (ML QOL 18 Foerster II p.279)

a) The "sign of Life" seems to have been received before baptism: perhaps similar to a pre-baptismal anointing. It is this sign which determines who will be delivered from the "jaws", not the baptism.

b) As Christian baptism is in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Mandaean baptism is in the name of Bihram Rabba, son of the Mighty Life.

c) "May your baptism protect you and be successful." This is a concept similar to that of the "seal", found in the Acts of Thomas 5:49.<sup>42</sup>

"Manda created me, Uthras established me (or: baptised me), they clothed me with radiance." - This is part of what is recorded as: "a set prayer for the baptismal wreath". This section is worth noting as another of the

many references to light in relation to baptism, for the idea of light and "enlightenment" became important enough in Christian baptism for the newly-baptised to be termed "enlightened ones". The prayer itself is as follows:

"Manda created me, Uthras established me (or: baptised me), they clothed me in radiance, and they wrapped me in light. Hazazban (?) held out to me the crown for my head, to me NN, and on these souls who descend to the Jordan and are baptised....."

(ML QOL. 19 Foerster II p. 279)

From the fourth century, and perhaps earlier, there is an Eastern Christian custom of placing garlands of flowers or "crowns" woven of flowers on the heads of those just baptised.<sup>43</sup> Reference to this is found in the "Odes and Psalms of Solomon" (edited by Harris), Ode I:1.10, IX:8, XVII:1, XX:7. The language does tend to be vague, but the references are almost certainly baptismal. (See: Ephraim Syr. "Hymns for the Epiphany" XIII:5 and 11, which are certainly baptismal hymns, and are very similar to the Odes of Solomon) This practice is, however, unknown in the West.<sup>44</sup>

The next passage contains a renunciation and profession not unlike that spoken by the Christian candidate immediately before his baptism, but instead of renouncing the devil and all his works, the Mandaean is renouncing the moon, the sun, the fire: perhaps the adversaries of the Mandaean religion:

" 'If I go with you to the Jordan,  
Who will be your witness ?'  
'Now that the sun has risen  
it will be our witness.'  
That is not what I am looking for,  
that is not what my soul desires.  
The sun of which you have spoken,  
rises in the morning and sets in the evening.

The sun of which you have spoken,  
the sun is completely destroyed."

The same is repeated for the moon and the fire.....

"The Jordan and its two banks  
will bear witness for us.  
Pihta, Kusta, and Mambua \*  
will bear witness for us.  
Habsabba (Sunday) and the collection (place of collection?  
Kanna) of alms  
will bear witness for us.  
The tent-sanctuary (Maskna), in which we worship,  
will bear witness for us.  
The alms in our hands  
will bear witness for us.  
Our father who is at our head (the baptiser or priest?)  
will bear witness for us.'  
This is what I am looking for,  
this is what my soul desires."  
(QOL. 21 Foerster II pp.279,80)

\*This could be a reference to the sacraments which  
normally follow the immersion in water.

Talking about Nbu-Christ who is leading some of the  
Jews into error and is turning them into "(God) fearers":

"He demeans himself humbly, goes to Jerusalem, and  
there captivates some of the Jews through sorcery and  
deceit, showing them great deeds and (magical) forms....  
He baptises them in cut-off water, and perverts the  
living baptism (masbuta) and baptises them (mamidilhun)  
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the  
Holy Spirit. He alienates them from the living baptism  
(masbuta) in the Jordan of living water, with which  
you, Adam, were baptised". (GR II 1 Foerster II pp.307,8)

Here there is great emphasis again on living water, and  
there is also the claim that their baptism goes back to  
Adam.

As has been stated already, this chapter is not an  
attempt to prove that Christian baptism originated in  
the Mandaean rite, but rather, it tries to show that  
baptism is not something peculiar to the Church and its  
Judaistic background; that even the interpretation we put

upon it, and aspects of the rite which have seemed purely Christian when compared with the practices of the Jewish baptismal sects, with the elements of Jewish proselyte baptism, and other lustrations, were employed and are still practised by at least one group of people who have no relation whatsoever to the Christian Church and very little to Judaism, and whose baptismal practice is far older than Christianity. We thus begin to see baptism as a rite devised by man to assist him in his faith and in the expression of that faith, rather than as something handed down in its entirety by God.

## NOTES

1. The Mandaeans were anti-Christian whereas the Manichaean religion contained a Christian element which does not appear to have been a secondary one. This attitude of the Manichaeans is much closer to that found in the baptismal sect which owed its origin to Elkasai than to the attitude of the Mandaeans. (See, A. Henrichs and L. Koenen, *Ein Griechischer Mani Codex*, Bonn 1970, p. 134-136.)
2. E. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, Oxford, 1937, p. 2-4.
3. *ibid.* p. 3 and 4 (also, GR I. 199).
4. *ibid.* p. 3, 4.
5. *ibid.* p. 4.
6. *ibid.* p. 4-5.
7. Haran Gawaitha: the original text has been extensively edited, making the work very difficult to date. It attacks Islam (although not as strongly as it does the Chaldaeans or Jews). It therefore has a possible dating of seventh or eighth century AD. It refers to "the Haran" (ie. Harran), and also to the "Mountain of the Madai", which it later places as that "which is called the inner Harran", although it is possible that this is a later gloss. In a subsequent passage it tells of a flight of the Nasurai from Jerusalem as the result of persecution by the Jews. (Drower p. 6,7)
8. See, S.A. Pallis, *Mandaean Studies*, Eng. tr. 1919, p. 160f., where he reconstructs Mandaean ritual from the Ginza, the Book of John, and liturgical texts. cf. Drower, p. 150-151.
9. *ibid.* p. 150-151.
10. E. Yarnold, *Awe Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, Slough 1971, p. 28f. cf. *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. J.G. Davies, New York 1972, p. 366, 367.
11. *Odes of Solomon*, ed. J.H. Charlesworth, Oxford 1973, Ode 1:1-3 (p. 17); 9:8-11 (p. 46); 17:1 (p. 74); 20:7,8 (p.86)
12. M. Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*, 2 vols., Giessen, 1915, and, *Der Ginza übersetzt und erklärt*, Göttingen, 1925.  
Th. Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik*, Halle, 1895.
13. A.J.H.W. Brandt, *Die mandäische Religion, ihre Entwicklung und geschichtliche Bedeutung*, Leipzig, 1912, and, *Die Mandäer: ihre Religion und ihre Geschichte*, Amsterdam, 1915.

R. Bultmann, Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting, London 1956, and Theology of the New Testament, 2 vols., London, 1952, 55.

W. Bousset, Hauptprobleme der Gnosis, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des alten u. neuen Testaments, Hft. 10, 1907.

R. Reitzenstein, Das mandäische Buch des Herrn der Grosse und die Evangelienuberlieferung, Heidelberg, 1919.

14. YARDNA: refers only to living or flowing water and contains no reference to the river Jordan, as the Mandaeans themselves state. (Drower p. xxiv)

15. GR III p. 94f., GR X p. 241, et passim. (ed. M. Lidzbarski, 1925)

16. The Zoroastrians and the Babylonian and Sumerian cults, like the Mandaeans observed both the ritual laws of ablutions and cleanliness and the moral laws. ( Drower p. xxi)

17. Drower p. 98, note 18.

18. ibid. p. 100. Also, GR XI, GR I (see p.208 ,209,210 above)

19. GR III (see p.208 ) cf. references in note 18 above.

20. See p.I54-I56 above.

21. Drower p. 101.

22. ibid. p. 102.

23. ibid. p. 102.

24. E. Yarnold, op. cit., p. 50f.

25. Didache 7:1.

26. Drower p. 112.

27. ABA: the black mantle is worn only for reasons of modesty as the RASTA clings too closely to the body when wet, and there does not seem to be any symbolic reason for wearing it.

28. GANZOWRA: now the highest rank of priest in Mandaeism.

29. KAPTHA: the small ritual drinking cup.

30. PEHTHA: the wafer of bread used during the sacrament.

31. QANINA: a small bottle used for holding sacramental water.

32. See note 11 above.

33. Drower p. 44, also Hippolytus, Ref. V 9. 21 (cf. p. 148)

34. Drower p. 46.

35. For a list of Mandaean holy books see Drower p. 24,25.

36. Quotations from the Mandaean writings are taken from the translations given by Rudolph in W. Foerster's book, *Gnosis* (Oxford 1974), which retain elements of the original translations by Mark Lidzbarski. (See Foerster p. 143, 144, and also p. 125f.)

37. See note 36 above.

38. See note 12 above, and Foerster p. 143, 144.

39. I have used Foerster because it is the most recent work of its kind, providing modern translations which retain elements of older scholarship while taking account of the modern position in Mandaean research. Also, since it copes with both the Gnostic writings and those of the Mandaeans it is possible to compare the two in translations of similar tone and presentation.

40. Trans. by K. Rudolph, taking account of the trans. by M. Lidzbarski. (See Foerster p. 144)

41. E. Yarnold, *op. cit.*, p. 21, 22, and 32, 33.

42. "'Apostle of the Highest, give me the seal, so that yon enemy may not return to me.' Then he made her step near him, laid his hands upon her and sealed her in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....."  
See p. 157, 158 above.

43. See note 11 above. Also *Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* p. 257, 258 for the use of crowns in marriage ceremonies (cf. Tertullian *Ad Ux.* 2.6)

44. See note 11 above.

10.

MANI AND THE ELKASITES



At the end of the fourth century, according to Epiphanius <sup>1</sup>, there were two kinds of Jewish Christians. This form of Christianity was that which Paul had encountered: it observed the Mosaic law but added to it its own rites and practices. It was also much more speculative and philosophic than either Judaism or mainstream Christianity. In his letters to the Asian churches it was teachings such as these that Ignatius was opposing. This was not so obvious in the second century, but one hundred years after Ignatius and Cerinthus there was a revival of it <sup>2</sup>.

During the pontificate of Callistus (217-222), Alexander (or Alcibiades) of Apamea in Syria brought with him to Rome the Book of Elkasai, or "the Hidden Power" (DUNAMŌN APOKEKALUMENĒN) <sup>3</sup>. This book was said to have been given to Elkasai around the third year of Trajan's rule by an angel called the Son of God who was accompanied by a female being called the Holy Spirit. The book contained a call to repentance and to purification by baptism, but not a once-for-all rite, one which was to be renewed repeatedly. It said that sin would always be forgiven no matter how great it was. This baptism was performed by the candidate immersing himself fully clothed in water and calling upon seven witnesses: heaven, water, the Holy Spirit, and the Angels of prayer, oil, salt, earth <sup>4</sup>. This baptism achieved purification and cured madness and disease.

The Elkasites were widespread and were known to Origen <sup>5</sup> and Epiphanius <sup>6</sup> in the East, and to Hippolytus <sup>7</sup> in

the West. Hippolytus notes <sup>8</sup> as does Origen <sup>9</sup> that circumcision and observance of the Law were part of the Elkasite system, along with magic and astrology. They also held the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis: Christ's birth to Mary was only one of many such experiences; he had experienced previous incarnations and would experience more in the future, and so Christianity is only one of a series of religions which will be followed by others <sup>10</sup>.

The Elkasites rejected parts of the Old Testament and of the Gospels, and totally rejected the Pauline works. They believed that they could outwardly deny Christ (and so avoid persecution) while still confessing him in their hearts <sup>11</sup>. Epiphanius writes of them:

"They were neither Christians, nor Jews, nor heathen, but something between all three - or rather, nothing <sup>12</sup> at all".

The information supplied by Epiphanius about the Elkasites is interspersed with comments about the Essenes, Ebionites and Sampsaeans <sup>13</sup>. He appears to regard the Elkasites as an off-shoot of the Ebionites who can also be identified with the Sampsaeans, whose name seems to be related to the Essene practice of invoking the sun at dawn <sup>14</sup>.

This period is part of the decline of Jewish Christianity, the final years of its distinct existence before degenerating into non-Christian sects in the time of Hippolytus; and by the time of Epiphanius and Jerome they were merely a curiosity posing no serious threat to Christianity.

Mani, Successor to the Elkasites

Mani's system of thought begins from the dualism of two co-eternal opposite beings or principles <sup>15</sup>, which is a simpler theory to develop than that of the Valentinians, and it may be, at least partially, due to this fact that Manichaeism became the only Gnostic sect to attain universal popularity, which appears to have been what Mani set out to achieve. He wanted to establish a new "Church" <sup>16</sup>, not a select group of "knowing ones", and for a time this sect was regarded by the Church in Rome as a serious threat and feared the complete destruction of the Church by Manichaeism <sup>17</sup>. Manichaeism spread from the centre of Asia to Egypt, Gaul, Rome, Spain and Dalmatia <sup>18</sup>. Mani himself says of his religion:

"Earlier religions were only spread in one land and in one language. My religion has grown so much that it is known in every land and in all languages". <sup>19</sup>

Mani's missionaries were, therefore, deployed to achieve this effect, and in this way it became the most powerful of the Gnostic sects. In some ways it is also the last of the Gnostic heresies, and it is fairly typical of the syncretism of the time, attempting to combine Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity. Mani believed himself to be the final revelation of God and began preaching at Ctesiphon around 242 AD. <sup>20</sup> He was born in Babylonia around 216AD., and because his birthplace was within the Persian empire his sect and his teaching were considered to be not only heretical but also politically hostile to Rome <sup>21</sup>. His death, which was by crucifixion, took place

in 272-275 at the instigation of Persian Zoroastrian priests.

Mani's father was a member of a baptist sect, sometimes identified as the Mandaeans, but much more probably the Elkasites.<sup>22</sup> It is, however, interesting that the sect from which Mani originated was sufficiently similar to the Mandaeans to be mistaken for them. It also means that the Mandaeans were not an isolated, freak, sect but possibly formed part of a fairly widespread pattern of which they are the last survivors, and it was the practices of such a group of people that caused Mani to reject the lustrations and baptisms which he had experienced at first hand: experience of a sect very similar to the Mandaeans.<sup>23</sup>

Fihrist reports:

"They teach that one must wash oneself and wash everything which one eats. Their head (chief, leader) is known by the name of al-Hasih (Elkasaios). He founded the sect and remains master of it, that is, he produced two systems, one manly, one womanly, and the vegetables are for the male gender, but the mistletoe (leaves ?) is for the womanly. They agree with the Manichaeans' approval what both foundation principles related to; but later severed themselves from this community".<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Elkasai is founder of the sect, and definitely was not the founder of Mandaeism, although there seems to have been a connection between the two at some time, which did not endure. The Mandaeans do not appear to have had this division of food as in the Elkasite sect,<sup>25</sup> and while they ritually washed household utensils they do not follow the same procedure with food. We can conclude, therefore, that the Elkasites were a sect quite separate from that

of the Mandaeans. Also, the Mandaeans were actively anti-Christian, repudiating Christ as a false prophet who baptised in "cut off" water (non-running) and who opposed true salvation (the title "Christians of Saint John" was probably taken later to make the sect more acceptable to the Christians with whom they were trading)<sup>26</sup>. If Manichaeism had developed out of Mandaeism, one would have expected the Christian element in Manichaeism to have been a later addition and therefore to take a quite clearly secondary position in the teaching of the sect, and also that it might have been restricted to Western Manichaeism where such an addition would be more advantageous. However, Mani himself speaks of Christ the Saviour with no rejection nor condemnation, so that the Christian element cannot be regarded as a later addition. He categorically denies that he has cancelled out anything the Saviour commanded<sup>27</sup>. In denying the necessity to baptise he takes care to point out that the Saviour was concerned with purity but with inner purity, not cleanness of the body achieved through washing, but cleanness of the soul achieved through knowledge (gnosis). Light has to be separated from darkness, life from death, and the living water from the turbid:

"Knowledge frees the soul from death and destruction".<sup>28</sup>

Mani is thus opposed to baptism and attempts to prove that the Saviour did not command it, as those who baptise claim he did. So although Mani was against baptism he was not against Christ, but rather felt that he was maintaining the true attitude of Jesus towards this

practice.

The Elkasites were divided on their opinion regarding Mani,<sup>29</sup> with one section believing him to be a dangerous heretic and the other believing him to be a true prophet, and more than this: they believed that Christ came to the world in different forms, for example in Adam and the prophets, and those who regarded Mani as a true prophet also regarded him as the latest incarnation of Christ.<sup>30</sup>

#### The Purification Regulations of the Elkasites

The life of the Elkasite sect, and possibly that of the Ebionites who were very similar but died out, was centred around their purification rites, and Mani argues that all this makes no sense since one can be baptised only once and cleansed only once. He says that to need cleansed so often means that they must pollute themselves daily, resulting in the need for repeated washings.<sup>31</sup>

The Elkasites believed that man contaminates himself each day, but they also believed that this contamination could be removed by washing:

"The body is a garment which always requires cleansing <sup>32</sup> from earthly dirt".

This demonstrates the very negative attitude towards the earthly and the material, but it is not totally negative, for they believed that in the end, after all the purifications and as a result of them, there is a final purification and the body will at last enter into the eternal rest, which the Elkasites believed awaited the

body and which could be achieved only through the accumulated effect of the daily washings.<sup>33</sup>

Mani, on the other hand, believed that there was no hope for the body and that one, therefore, had to separate oneself from it through gnosis.<sup>34</sup> Thus, water baptism had no relevance for him. In fact, he believed that man has no right to pollute the water as he does by baptising in it; and to support this theory he tells the story of Elkasai going to wash and being reprimanded by the water for polluting it. The result of the encounter is that Elkasai withdraws without washing, and according to Mani this happened to Elkasai with the same outcome on at least two occasions.<sup>35</sup>

Mani replaces baptism, even first baptism, with gnosis: spiritual cleansing through knowledge rather than the cleansing of the body with water. He also rejects the Elkasite practice of washing food which they believed would contaminate or defile them if left uncleansed.

#### Mani's Relationship to the Elkasites

The Elkasites taught that Christ came in ever-new incarnations,<sup>36</sup> and so it was not difficult for Mani, coming from this sect, to claim to be the latest of these incarnations. Another aspect of their teaching was the distinction between the heavenly and the earthly Jesus, and in this Mani concurred.<sup>37</sup> The Elkasites accepted Matthew's gospel and Mani accepted the Christian Gospel in general;<sup>38</sup> and his food observances and asceticism are

also similar to those of the Elkasites. It is clear, therefore, that Mani did not reject all of the teaching and practices of the sect from which he originates, although he did refuse to have any part of their ritual washings which were central to the life style of the sect<sup>39</sup>.

We see in Manichaeism the most popular and enduring of the Gnostic sects<sup>40</sup>, the rejection of rites which held so much importance for areas of earlier Gnosticism, and the expression of views which would from time to time be heard in later orthodox Christianity.

#### Summary from the "Greek Mani Codex"

Texts prior to the Greek Mani Codex had held that Manichaeism was a South Babylonian baptist sect, such as the Mandaeans, who increasingly came to be noted in the field of Gnostic investigation. This has resulted in the identification of the sect in which Mani was brought up with the Mandaeans. The new text, however, shows that this cannot be the case. In the chapter headed "The Theorist", el Nadim speaks in detail of the sect which Mani's father had joined<sup>41</sup>: a sect who wash themselves daily and who wash everything they eat; their leader is named Elkasaios (el Hassi), who asserted that because there were two natures - male and female - the vegetables should be assigned to the male and the "mistletoe" (or leaves ?) to the female (although the point of this is not clear). References to the "elkasites" tended to receive little credibility because there was so little connection between what el Hassi said and the actual



practices of the "Elkasite" sect - only baptism. 42

Mani was, therefore, linked with the Mandaeans. The Mandaeans, however, regarded Jesus as a false prophet who employed divine power against salvation. If Mani had come from this sect the Christian element in Manichaeism would have been secondary, but the new papyri show that this is not the case. The new codex quotes passages written under the name of Baraies in which Mani himself speaks and which show that he no longer accepted the food and purification regulations of the baptist sect. The result was that he was attacked by the baptisers, to whom he replied:

"When you therefore attack me about baptism so I will prove to you out of your own law and what was revealed to your leaders that one does not need to purify oneself. - Elkasai, leader of your sect, shows that perfectly clearly. For, one time when he went to purify himself there appeared to him an apparition of a man who said to him - 'Is it not enough that your animals offend me? You yourself do me a greater wrong and commit outrage against my waters!'".

43

The outcome of the conversation was that Elkasai did not bathe, and a later conversation had the same result, and this for Mani is proof that there is no need for all the purification rites of the sect.

As already outlined, Mani states that the demands of the Saviour are not contradicted in any way by his own teaching; that Christ taught purity of the soul which comes through knowledge; that this knowledge consists in the division of light from darkness, and so on, and that it frees the soul from death and destruction. In other words, what the Elkasites hoped for through their daily purifications, Mani sought through knowledge.

## Baptism Without Water

Mani rejects baptism with water in favour of spiritual cleansing, and, for him, this cleansing is effected by the attainment of knowledge. Although this is the only example of such total rejection of the baptismal rite considered within this work, similar concepts of spiritual cleansing or of some form of baptism without water are to be found within the New Testament itself, but without the rejection of the physical rite of baptism.

There are, for example, a number of usages in the New Testament of the word BAPTIZEIN which might be considered in relation to this kind of non-physical experience. In Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50, "baptism" is into suffering and death. Whatever the actual meaning is and whoever originally spoke the words, it is not a reference to a water rite. BAPTIZEIN is, therefore, at this stage of the development of its usage, not limited to baptism with water<sup>44</sup>.

Galatians 3:27 has:

"For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ".

ENDUSASTHAI CHRISTON is a metaphor taken from the Hebrew tradition of changing clothes to represent a spiritual change, as in Isaiah 61:10 and Zechariah 3:3f. This being so, it seems unlikely that this reference to baptism in Galatians, or those in Romans, Colossians and Ephesians, are references to water baptism, but are attempts to articulate the spiritual experience of becoming a Christian. There is no indication that this

experience or transformation is attributable to any physical rite, although there is never any rejection of water baptism.

I Corinthians 12:13 says:

"For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body...  
..... and all were made to drink of one Spirit".

In this passage alone Paul makes explicit reference to baptism in the Spirit. This could mean that the Spirit is received during baptism with water, but since Paul's writings make frequent use of BAPTIZEIN when there is clearly no water baptism involved it is unlikely that a water rite is implicit in this particular reference.

This means that a physical rite is not necessary for the receiving of the Holy Spirit and that one can receive, or be baptised with, the Spirit without the employment of a physical rite. For Paul, baptism is the expression of all that has already happened: the receiving of the Holy Spirit, new life and forgiveness of sins are marked and completed at baptism, but baptism is not itself necessary for the receiving of these.

In John 3:5 there is the reference to water and the Spirit:

"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit.....".

Whether or not one would argue for the omission of HUDATOS KAI, water is not regarded here as being sufficient in itself for entry to the Kingdom of God<sup>45</sup>. It is also interesting to note a point made by the Gospel of Philip regarding the efficacy of the water rite:

"64 And came up without having received anything.....  
.....But if he receive the Holy Spirit.....".

It is possible to go down into the water, go through the physical rite of baptism with water without gaining

anything by it. The receiving of the Holy Spirit is what gives it value, and, in this writer's view the physical rite does not necessarily bestow the Holy Spirit: water on its own is not enough.

Also worth remembering is the lack of reference to the baptism of the disciples themselves (although some may have been baptised by John) or of the women who followed him. Either their personal association with Jesus or the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost (or a combination of both) appears to have been sufficient<sup>46</sup>. Then there is the example of Apollos. He had been baptised by John and had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Despite the fact that he had not received "Christian" baptism, he, unlike the Ephesians, is not re-baptised, because he has received the Holy Spirit. His receiving of the Spirit is thus independent of any physical rite. However, the very fact that he was not re-baptised indicates that a strong connection between receiving the Spirit and water baptism is implicit in the New Testament at this time although the two are by no means inseparable. \*

In New Testament thinking the receiving of the Spirit is all-important, taking precedence over the physical rite and giving to it whatever importance it possesses. Mani's emphasis, however, is on knowledge:

"Knowledge frees the soul from death and destruction".<sup>47</sup>

Also different from New Testament thought is his belief that there is no hope for the body. There is, therefore, no point in cleansing it, and by trying to cleanse the body one pollutes the water, which man has no right to do. The cleansing of the spirit is what is important and

this is achieved not by baptism but by the attaining of knowledge.

Mani's attitude to baptism is, therefore, quite different from that of the New Testament references cited above. For, although these do not argue the necessity of baptism in water for becoming a Christian or receiving the Holy Spirit, neither do they dismiss it as an idle or harmful practice. For the New Testament, baptism marks completion and commitment to Christ, so that while there might be agreement between the New Testament and Mani to the point of the non-essential nature of a water-rite for a transformation or spiritual cleansing to take place, there would be fundamental disagreement over the reasons for this.

A non-physical, non-water, understanding of baptism is clearly known to the New Testament writers and accepted by them, but there is no rejection of the water rite. Mani's rejection of it reflects the importance which he places upon the water itself, and the identity which he attributes to it, which are concepts foreign to the New Testament writers and to orthodox Christianity in general. The receiving of the Holy Spirit, spiritual baptism, is usually linked by the Church during this period to baptism with water or at least to a series of actions such as anointings and baptism, in which water is central as in the rite described by Hippolytus. The New Testament writers, however, seem much more aware of an experience which they would call baptism, which is a receiving of the Holy Spirit but is unrelated to a water rite. Superficially this might appear similar to the stance taken by Mani, but as demonstrated above any similarity is very

slight, and his attitude would find little support not only within orthodox Christianity but within "Christian" Gnosticism.

#### Bibliographical Note

The subject of Manichaeism is far vaster than the treatment of it within this particular work might indicate. For this reason I am listing below a number of books which give far more detailed consideration to both Mani and Manichaeism, and which, by their very existence, help demonstrate the importance of Mani during this period of history.

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G. Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism*. London, 1965.

1. K. Holl (ed.), Epiphanius, Haereses XXX. G.C.S. 25. Leipzig, 1915. p. 333f.
2. cf. Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion. Boston, 1963. p.210f.
3. Epiphanius, Haereses XIX 2. G.C.S. 25, p. 219.
4. In the later orthodox rite (eg. Bp. Sarapion's Prayer Book) the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit are called upon.
5. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History VI. 38. G.C.S. II 2. (ed. E. Schwartz). Leipzig, 1908. p. 592, 593.
6. Haer. XIX, XXX, LII. G.C.S. I, p. 217f. and 333.
7. P. Wendland (ed.), Hippolytus, Refutatio IX. 13-17. G.C.S. 3, p. 251, 255.
8. ibid. IX. 14, 15, 16, see p. 252, 253, 254.
9. Paul Koetschau (ed.), Origen, De Principiis IV. 3. G.C.S. 22, p. 334, and Contra Celsum II 1. G.C.S. 2, p. 126.
10. Refutatio IX. 14. G.C.S. 3, p. 252, 253.
11. H.E. VI. 38. G.C.S. I 2, p. 592, 593.
12. Haereses LIII. 1. G.C.S. II, p. 315.
13. ibid. XIX, XXX, LIII, respectively.
14. Josephus, The Jewish Wars II. viii 5.
15. For detailed study of Manichaeism see F. Decret, Aspects du Manichaeisme dans l'Afrique romaine. Paris, 1970. (cf. Hans Jonas, op. cit. p. 210, 211, 212, 215).
16. A. Henrichs and L. Koenen, Ein Griechischer Mani Codex. Bonn 1970. p. 98.
17. ibid. p. 98.
18. ibid. p. 97.
19. ibid. p. 97.
20. J. Stevenson, A New Eusebius. London, 1957. p. 281-283.
21. Henrichs and Koenen, op. cit., p. 98.
22. ibid. p. 133.
23. ibid. p. 133 and 140.
24. ibid. p. 133.

25. *ibid.* p. 134.
26. E. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*. Oxford, 1937. p. 2-4.
27. Henrichs and Koenen, *op. cit.*, p. 136. (Kolner Codex 91: 19 - 92: 11)
28. *ibid.* p. 137. (Kolner Codex 84:9 - 85:1)
29. *ibid.* p. 139. (Kolner Codex 80:16-18)
30. *ibid.* p. 139-140.
31. *ibid.* p. 141. (Kolner Codex 82:23 - 83:13)
32. *ibid.* p. 142.
33. *ibid.* p. 142 and 144. (Kolner Codex 43:1-10)
34. *ibid.* p. 144. (Kolner Codex 89:15-21)
35. *ibid.* p. 143. (Kolner Codex 43:1-10)
36. *ibid.* p. 139, 140, 159.
37. *ibid.* p. 159.
38. *ibid.* p. 159.
39. *ibid.* p. 159. (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 52, 54f.)
40. H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p. 206f. and Henrichs and Koenen, *op. cit.*, p. 97, 98.
41. See Henrichs and Koenen, *op. cit.*, p. 133 and 140.
42. *ibid.* p. 134.
43. *ibid.* p. 135.
44. See p. 38f. above for fuller discussion of BAPTIZEIN usages.
45. See p. 44 and 45 above.
46. See p. 48, 49 above.
47. See p. 22I above.

\* Acts 10:44-48 - The Spirit is received before water baptism and is not dependant upon it.



CONCLUSION

As was indicated in the "Summary", this survey of baptismal references and practices does not prove or disprove any particular theories of baptism. If it has achieved anything it is only in that it has considered some of the less common approaches to and comments upon the subject.

It might be considered appropriate at this point to pull together some of the things which have been said in the previous pages and to draw final conclusions about them. However, as is clear in many of the individual chapters, there is no final conclusion to be reached, no new discovery to be finally revealed.

The sources, primary and secondary, have been presented and discussed, as have some selected non-orthodox baptismal practices. They have been included simply because they were written, or because they were practised, and not because they prove or disprove a particular theory. To attempt to mould them into some kind of single entity at this late stage would be artificial, if not quite impossible.

It was not expected when this work was begun to be able to trace the true origins of baptism solely to the New Testament, nor to any other one source. There is, therefore, no need now to express surprise that this is so or to try to summarise the case for such a conclusion - it is already so widely acknowledged.

The baptismal rite of Hippolytus has been considered as have Old and New Testament references; also some of the orthodox rites as well as non-orthodox practices such as those found among the Gnostics, Mandaeans and Elkasites; and the lack of

a physical rite within Manichaeism has also been noted.

The study was begun with Hippolytus rather than with any New Testament accounts of baptism, because Hippolytus provides a detailed example of an early baptismal rite as practised in his own time by the Church (or, at least, by one part of it), and it is in the life and practice of the Church itself that the origins and development of Christian baptism will be found, not in any one body of writing. That this is so can be seen from the negative conclusions which have to be drawn when the various sources are considered for possible unique starting points of the rite.

Some of the less usual sources, primary and secondary, cited in this study may not be considered as the most relevant by today's standards of scholarship; they may not be regarded as worthy of special consideration, but the fact that they do contain references, or even possible references to baptism - where it originated or how it developed - renders them of some interest, however limited, in a survey (for its own sake) of origins and developments of Christian baptism.

There are many washing rites in many religions which have not been considered and only those which could have had, or claimed to have some connection with Christianity have been noted (eg. the later Mandaeans claimed to be "Christians of St John"), but that is not to say that Christian baptism may not in some way have been influenced by such practices.

The main conclusion to be reached is that the origins of Christian baptism will be found only in the whole socio-

religious scene onto which Christianity and the Church entered, and developments of the rite have to be sought throughout the whole history of the Church and of the world in which it had and has its being. - There is no one original source of baptism - there are many possible sources. There is no one path of development, but many possible paths. Some of these possible sources (some only remotely possible) have been noted here; some courses of development of the rite - Christian and non-Christian, orthodox and non-orthodox - have been considered, and if nothing more is proved or demonstrated, at least it has been shown how varied and at times alien is some of the landscape through which Christian baptism has travelled to reach the twentieth century in its various contemporary forms.

Appendix I

THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION  
OF HIPPOLYTUS

The following is a series of extracts from the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus taken from Gregory Dix's edition of the work. These provide an outline order for the baptismal rite recorded by Hyppolytus.

## XXI. OF THE CONFERRING OF HOLY BAPTISM

### Blessing of Font

1. And at the hour when the cock crows they shall first of all pray over the water.
2. When they come to the water, let the water be pure and flowing.

### The Neophytes

3. And they shall put off their clothes.
4. And they shall baptise the little children first. And if they can answer for themselves, let them answer. But if they cannot, let their parents answer or someone from their family.
5. And next they shall baptise the grown men.....

### Consecration of Holy Oils

6. And at the time determined for baptising the bishop shall give thanks over the oil and put it into a vessel and it is called the Oil of Thanksgiving.
7. And he shall take also the other oil and exorcise it, and it is called the Oil of Exorcism.
8. And let a deacon carry the Oil of Exorcism and stand

on the left hand of the presbyter who will do the anointing. And another deacon shall take the Oil of Thanksgiving and stand on the right hand.

#### Renunciation

9. And when the presbyter takes hold of each one of those who are to be baptised, let him bid him renounce, saying: "I renounce thee, Satan, and all thy service and all thy works".

#### First Anointing

10. And when he has said this let him anoint him with the Oil of Exorcism saying:

"Let all evil spirits depart from thee".

#### Profession of Faith and Baptism

12. And when he who is baptised goes down to the water, let him who baptises lay a hand on him saying thus:

"Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty ?"

13. And he who is being baptised shall say:

"I believe".

14. Let him forthwith baptise him once, having his hand laid on his head.

15. And after this let him say:

"Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God,  
Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
Who was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate,  
And died and was buried  
And rose the third day living from the dead  
and ascended into the heavens,  
And sat down at the right hand of the Father,  
And will come to judge the living and the dead ?"

16. And when he says: "I believe", let him baptise him the second time.

17. And again let him say:

"Dost thou believe in the Holy Spirit in the Holy Church, And the resurrection of the flesh ?"

18. And he who is being baptised shall say: "I believe". And so let him baptise him the third time.

#### Second Anointing

19. And afterwards when he comes up from the water he shall be anointed by the presbyter with the Oil of Thanksgiving saying:

"I anoint thee with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ".

#### XXII CONFIRMATION

##### Imposition of Hands

1. And the Bishop shall lay his hand upon them.....

##### Confirmation

2. After this pouring the consecrated oil from his hand and laying his hand on his head, he shall say:

"I anoint thee with holy oil in God the Father Almighty and Christ Jesus and the Holy Ghost".

3. And sealing him on the forehead, he shall give him the kiss of peace and say:

"The Lord be with you".

And he who has been sealed shall say:

"And with thy spirit".

##### Prayers of the Faithful

5. Thenceforward they shall pray together with all the



people. But they shall not previously pray with the faithful before they have undergone all these things.

#### Kiss of Peace

6. And after the prayers, let them give the kiss of peace.

Appendix II

CONFIRMATION

Tertullian's De Baptismo and Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition show a rite which comprises of more than baptism with water: a rite which incorporated an anointing with oil and the laying on of hands, which immediately followed baptism. Tertullian's account of the baptismal rite was probably written about ten years before the Apostolic Tradition and shows a rite in which the Spirit was not given in the course of the baptism in water:

"Not that in the waters we obtain the Holy Spirit, but that cleansed in the water we are prepared for the Spirit..... The oil flows upon our flesh, but profits our spirit..... then a hand is laid upon us, by its blessing calling down and inviting the Holy Spirit".<sup>1</sup>

The rite, however, is still one rite and all of it is presided over by the bishop.

In the New Testament also there is evidence of a rite other than baptism in water, although as ill-defined as the New Testament water rite. Philip in Samaria, for example, baptised converts in the name of the Lord Jesus,<sup>2</sup> but this was not considered to have been completed by the gift of the Spirit and therefore required an additional act. Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem for this purpose; they prayed for the converts and laid hands on them, by which actions "they received the Holy Spirit"<sup>3</sup>. At Ephesus Paul finds converts who had received only John's baptism, whom he teaches about the Holy Spirit, then baptises in the name of the Lord Jesus and lays his hands on them, at which time they received the Holy Spirit<sup>4</sup>. One cannot, however, conclude from this that the New Testament baptismal rite was always completed with such actions, for this would be to disregard New

Testament references in which the Holy Spirit is received with only the water rite:

"Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins; and <sup>5</sup> you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit".

The earliest real evidence, therefore, of "confirmatio" or BEBAIŌSIS is given in the Apostolic Tradition XXII (c. 215 AD.) and in Tertullian's De Baptismo VIII (c. 198), which both show a rite which follows baptism in water: a prayer is said by the bishop with his hands extended over the candidates, after which they are anointed on the forehead with oil, followed by the imposition of a hand on the head of each and the signing of each on the forehead with the sign of the cross. This practice continued in the West, but in the East the imposition of the hand ceased early on and unction alone remained, except in Egypt where both were retained. In the Syriac-speaking churches there was no post-baptismal rite, but baptism was preceded by an unction to which was attached great importance, as seen in the Didascalia Apostolorum, the Acts of Thomas, and the History of John the Son of Zebedee. In the later rites in Egypt, the East and Rome there were two unctions: one with oil before baptism and one with Chrism afterwards which was sometimes accompanied by the imposition of a hand.

The separation of Confirmation from baptism was a later development in the Western Church, and in this form cannot be traced to any practice of the early Church. In the schedule "Confirmation Today" attached to the Interim Reports of the Joint Committees on Confirmation

which were presented to the Convocations of Canterbury and York, October 1944, Confirmation is regarded as the layman's ordination, although there is some contradiction of views within the schedule, and a view of Confirmation as ordination could lead to a concept far beyond anything intended by the early Church. The schedule <sup>6</sup> says that by baptism one receives new life and membership in the Church, while Confirmation commissions one for "the exercise of that ministry which" one's "membership entails", and it likens this to the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus <sup>7</sup>: he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and anointed with the Holy Spirit at baptism; "the former determines what Jesus is; the latter strengthens him for what he does". This, however, seems to be a great oversimplification, and certainly not a concept which would have been recognisable to the early Church, which drew no clear distinction between baptism with water and the post-baptismal rite.

The Latin name for this post-baptismal rite was "signaculum", "consignatio", the equivalent of the Greek SPHRAGIS - "seal". It was not until the fifth century that a new name was given to this part of the rite: confirmation. It is first found in Canon 2 of the Council of Orange held in Gaul in 441, and the term was used again by Pope Leo I in Epistle clix 7, around 458, but it was not in common use until near the end of the century in Gaul, as in the Homily of Pseudo Eusebius:

"The Holy Spirit bestows at the font all that is needed to restore innocence. In Confirmation he provides an increase of grace. In baptism we are born to new life,

after baptism we are confirmed for combat".<sup>8</sup>

This statement was taken by the ninth century author of the Forged Decretals, and became the foundation of the whole Western mediaeval theology of confirmation.

For four centuries Peter Lombard was considered to be the most important theological writer, but in his writings on confirmation he used as his source Gratian's "Decretus" which had nine items. Four of these were short canons of late and unimportant Gallican and Spanish Councils. The fifth was Rabanus' statement that in confirmation the Spirit is given that the candidate "may be strengthened to preach to others the gift which he has himself received in baptism", which excludes his previous statement that the Spirit is not bestowed by baptism in water but by the anointing: a statement whose adoption could have proved an embarrassing clause to a Church whose doctrine of baptism was contrary to this almost gnostic teaching. The appropriate section, therefore, was adopted and the rest omitted. The remaining four items come from the Forged Decretals. Lombard, however, did not adopt the most important sentence from Gratian's writings:

"So closely are these two sacraments (of baptism and confirmation) conjoined, that they may only be separated by the interruption of death, one cannot be performed without the other".

Had this sentence been incorporated it would have inhibited any further development in the West of the separate rite of confirmation. However, the Forged Decretals as quoted by Lombard had tremendous impact and were regarded as authoritative in all discussions

regarding confirmation: it was the teaching contained in these which became the standard for the Western Church - the teaching that confirmation simply strengthens the gift bestowed at baptism; a strengthening which the Church of the first two and a half centuries would have regarded as unnecessary after the administration of the complete rite of baptism, including the pre-baptismal and post-baptismal anointings. This idea of "strengthening to preach" seems inapplicable to infant confirmation, and appears to have originated in the Middle Ages to rationalise the administering of baptism followed by confirmation some years later.

Originally there was no distinction made between infants and adults - infants too were anointed and hands were laid on them, but the Roman and African churches demanded that anointing and imposition of the hand must be given by the bishop, and this resulted in the separation of the rite, since as the Church grew and, therefore, the area of the bishop's responsibility increased, and as they became more involved politically, it was impossible for them to be at every baptismal celebration and it could take a number of years for them to get around to completing the rite. Thus the rite became separated: first from necessity, later as a matter of doctrine.

The Roman rite associated the post-baptismal rite with the gift of the Spirit, but it is not clear that this was the case in the rest of the Western Church, which seems rather to have viewed it as a simple post-baptismal

anointing of the forehead. In Gaul and Spain it was given by the priest who baptised, although the oil had been consecrated by the bishop. The early Syrian Church had no post baptismal anointing such as this, recognising no sign other than the water by which the Spirit was imparted, indicating that the second rite was not universally observed. In the Eastern churches today, "confirmation" is given by the priest who baptises, and the rite has therefore retained its original connection with baptism <sup>9</sup>.

The origin of confirmation is a controversial issue. The Council of Trent regarded it as one of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ. Roman Catholic theologians define confirmation as chrism or imposition of hands or as a combination of the two. The form used throughout the Roman Catholic Church says:

"I sign thee with the sign of the cross, and I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

The distinction made between the grace of baptism and that of confirmation is that in baptism the Holy Spirit is given for pardon and new birth; in confirmation, for strength to preach the Gospel and to live the adult Christian life. This idea seems inapplicable, as already stated, to infant confirmation. It is, therefore, a concept not only contrary to the practice of the early Church, but also unacceptable to the Eastern Church.

In the Middle Ages the origin of confirmation was sometimes traced to Jesus laying his hands on the children, or to the breathing on the apostles <sup>10</sup>, or to his teaching



after the resurrection about "the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" <sup>11</sup>. It was also thought that the example of confirmation was already given by the apostles when they laid their hands on those already baptised so that the Spirit might come upon them <sup>12</sup>. In the ancient world it was customary, after bathing, to use oil. It has, therefore, been suggested that confirmation may have originated from this. Another possibility is that it developed from the gnostic and mystery rites where candidates proceeded from one stage of initiation to another. The variety of explanations shows that there can be no certainty in this matter.

There were various reasons for the custom of reserving the rite of confirmation, among them were:

- i) The difficulty of obtaining episcopal confirmation as the Church grew, and also the belief that baptism bestowed the grace of the Holy Spirit and all that was necessary for salvation - which is still stated in the Book of Common Prayer.
- ii) The Reformers regarded confirmation as an "idle ceremony". Baptism is the one sacrament of initiation, and they did not accept that before confirmation people were not fully Christian. However, they believed it valuable that at some time the adult Christian should have an opportunity to confirm the vows taken for him at baptism. This led to a rite of "confirmation", which consisted of an examination of the candidates and a declaration of their Christian commitment, followed by an imposition of the minister's hand which was understood as a blessing.

In this way the rite of confirmation became separated from baptism, developed, and changed almost beyond recognition.

Since we now have two rites - one of baptism and one of confirmation - when is the Holy Spirit given ? We cannot say that the Spirit is given twice in an identical way. Nor can we say that baptism is incomplete because the Spirit is only given in confirmation. New Testament and patristic evidence shows beyond doubt that the Spirit is given in baptism. Can we then speak of more than one "gift of the Spirit" ? Speaking of confirmation, Cyril Richardson said:

"It brings one into a new relation with the Holy Spirit so that his appropriate gifts and graces can be poured<sup>13</sup> out for a new state of life".

At ordination, for example, we do not think of the Spirit as given in such a way that baptism was incomplete, rather the Spirit seems to be given in a different way. In the Gelasian Sacramentary prayer for the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit - the Comforter's gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, courage, knowledge, piety and the fear of the Lord - are sought. Such gifts would be of great importance, certainly in the opinion of the Sacramentary's compiler, to the new member of the Church, and was, perhaps, an attempt to give some substance to the otherwise vague references to the "gift of the Spirit".

The statement of faith drawn up at Nicaea states:

"We acknowledge one 'baptisma' for the remission of sins"; this is the complete rite of initiation. "The Nicene

Fathers knew nothing of a partial initiation in infancy and a sacrament of adolescence called 'confirmation'." 14  
SPHRAGIS, perfectio, or confirmation, denote a rite of anointing and imposition of the hand with an invocation of the Spirit, immediately following on the act of water baptism, be it infant or adult.

It certainly seems that the early Church knew no division of the initiation rite into water baptism and confirmation: it was one act.

## NOTES

1. De Baptismo IV, C.S.E.L. XX, p. 203,4.
2. Acts 8:12.
3. Acts 8:14-17.
4. Acts 19:4.
5. 1 Cor. 12:13.
6. Section 15p. 11.
7. Section 8.
8. Ps. Eusebius, Hom. de Pentecoste 4, ed. Fr. Glorie, Collectio Gallicana, Brepols 1970-71, Homilia XXIX, p. 337-41.
9. E.C. Whitaker, Article on Confirmation, Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship, S.C.M., London 1972.
10. John 20:22.
11. Acts 1:3.
12. Acts 8:15; 19:6.
13. C. Richardson, Proposed Revision of Our Liturgy, Anglican Theological Review, vol XXV 1953. p. 174-80.
14. C.E. Pocknee, Water and the Spirit, London 1967. p. 16.

Appendix III

SOME LATER RITES

The Syrian Rite (early fourth century)

Two forms of the baptismal rite were to be found in Syria:

i) the native Syriac rite as in the Didascalia and gnostic works, including the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles.

The main characteristic of this is the absence of the post-baptismal rite, although it did have a pre-baptismal unction.

The Nestorian rite developed from this.

ii) The second form comes from the Greek speaking churches of Jerusalem and Antioch, and has a post-baptismal rite.

All existing Eastern rites developed from this one, except the Nestorian rite, and even that adopted a rite after baptism.

The earliest information about this second rite is to be found in the catechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem. Egeria also describes the rite as she encountered it on her travels through the Holy Land:

Lent lasted for eight weeks, with a total number of fast days of forty one, since Saturdays and Sundays were excluded from the fast. Candidates for baptism - PHŌTIZOMENOI or competentes - were prepared and instructed during this period by the bishop.

These people had given in their names before Lent began and on the first day of Lent the bishop inquired into the character of the candidates, for which purpose witnesses were called. Those who passed were admitted to instruction.

Each instruction began with an exorcism, then the bishop delivered his address.

From Palm Sunday to Easter commemoration of the Passion was carried out in Jerusalem. This involved many activities and therefore left no time for instruction.

On the Tuesday after Easter, instruction was resumed, and this time the sacraments were discussed.

After five weeks of Lent had passed, the Creed was taught to the catechumens who learned it by heart and repeated it on Palm Sunday.

Baptism was administered in the evening before Easter day.

The rite began in the vestibule of the baptistry where the candidates took off all their clothes but the under garment (CHITŌN).

They renounced Satan, facing the West, and professed faith in the Trinity, facing the East.

In the baptistry, the candidates undressed completely. They were anointed from head to foot with exorcised oil, then led to the water and baptised by threefold immersion which was preceded by the final interrogation: they were asked if they believed in "the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" ( which corresponds to the threefold interrogation along with immersion found in early times, but which here preceded the immersions).

They then received unction with chrism: they were anointed on the forehead, ears, nose and breast.

In Cyril's account of the rite the candidates wore white robes on the days following baptism.

## The Egyptian Rite (late fourth century)

Accounts of this rite are to be found in the Canonical Responses which are attributed to Timothy, Bishop of Alexandria (381-85), and also in the Egyptian Church Order.

The normal length of the catechumenate, as given by the Church Order, is three years, but this may be shortened if it is considered appropriate. During this period there is close examination of the life, character and activities of the catechumens, who are instructed and attend the liturgy, but are dismissed after the first part of the mass with the laying on of hands and prayer.

Towards Easter, those considered satisfactory are set apart for special instruction, but the length of this is not stated. These people are allowed to hear the gospel and are exorcised daily by the laying on of hands - later this is done by the bishop.

On Thursday of Holy Week the candidates bathe.

On Friday they fast.

The Easter vigil begins with a final exorcism by the bishop after which he breathes in their faces, signs the brow, ears and nose.

The baptismal rite begins with the consecration of the water, which has to be fresh and flowing, except in special circumstances.

The two oils are consecrated by the bishop: the oil of thanksgiving and the oil of exorcism.

After the renunciation the candidate is anointed with the



oil of exorcism.

There follows the profession of faith after which the candidate is baptised - children first, then men, then women.

Baptism is by three immersions, at each of which the candidate professes his faith in a section of the creed. There is no mention of a baptismal formula.

After baptism the candidates are anointed with oil: the oil of thanksgiving, which is performed by presbyters, as was the first anointing.

The candidates then dress and enter the assembly.

The bishop lays on his hand, anoints them on the head with the oil of thanksgiving, and signs their forehead.

The Kiss of Peace ends the rite and the mass follows.

After communion, the newly baptised are given milk and honey to drink.

#### The Milanese Rite (late fourth century)

Information regarding this rite is supplied by Ambrose's *De Mysteriis* and by the sermons, "De Sacramentis" (c. 391).

Catechumens wishing to be baptised at Easter gave in their names and were signed with the sign of the cross, after which they were known as "competentes".

On the Sunday before Easter they learned the creed, and the Lord's Prayer was taught to them after baptism. In Milan the candidates were not dismissed from the liturgy before the reading of the gospel.

During Lent they received daily instruction on Christian

behaviour and on the basics of the Faith. This instruction was given at special Lenten services which were held at the third and ninth hours from Monday to Friday. Genesis and Proverbs were read during the first five weeks of Lent, and Job and Tobit during Holy Week.

An effeta and renunciation came immediately before baptism. The effeta was performed by touching the ears and nose: the "mystery of opening".

The unction and renunciation were supervised by priests and deacons, while the bishop consecrated the water. After this the priests and deacons went down into the font, and the candidates were baptised with a threefold questioning and immersion. They are then anointed on the head with chrism by the bishop, who then starts the washing of the feet of the newly baptised which is completed by the presbyters. This is followed by the "spiritual seal": the signing of the candidate by the bishop, which was possibly accompanied by the laying on of a hand.

After baptism they all joined the assembled Church and the Easter mass was begun, in which the newly baptised received communion.

Later, the Milanese rite changed completely, but when this change took place is unknown. It resulted in something similar to the Roman rite as described by John the Deacon, with the renunciation placed at the beginning when the catechumens became competentes. The effeta disappears while three scrutinies, which take place on Saturdays, are added. On the Saturday before Palm Sunday

the creed is taught to the candidates, but no explanation of the gospels or of the Lord's Prayer is given.

On the Thursday of Holy Week chrism and oil are consecrated at the mass.

On the evening before Easter day the baptismal rite begins:

the water is consecrated;

there is a dialogue between the administrator and the deacons who are assisting, and later between the administrator and the candidates: "What have you come to do ?" (et cetera);

a litany is sung during the baptism;

after baptism in the water the candidate's head is anointed and a prayer is said, and there is a signing to

which is attributed the sevenfold gift of the Spirit;

when it is the bishop who is baptising, there follows the foot washing ceremony;

and the rite ends with a thanksgiving.

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